

249

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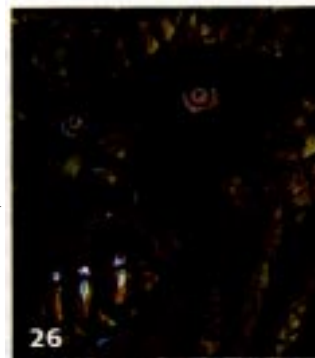
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## ON THE COVER

Michael Roele falls before the might of the dread Gorgon in this month's cover by BRTHRIGHT® campaign artist Tony Szczudlo.



# The Wyrms' Turn™

## Making History

To be a great DM, first you must be a good historian. Of course, that might seem like quite a challenge if you're running your own campaign world and must first create that history.

The job isn't much easier if you're running a relatively young setting. Usually you'll have only a core rules system and a single book or boxed set, most of which must focus on the present of the setting.

Even if you're one of those fortunate many who use a campaign with pages upon pages of ready-made history (say, the *DRAGONLANCE®*, the *FORGOTTEN REALMS®*, or the *GREYHAWK®* setting), then you still have quite a chore ahead of you just reading and digesting all of that background.

Fortunately, you needn't keep every last footnote of history in mind when running a game. What's important isn't that you have the knowledge of an Elminster or an Astinus; you can make do just by conveying a sense of history. Doing that requires nothing more than a few seeds of a larger story and some careful planting. Eventually, those seeds will sprout in the players' imaginations, and they themselves will create the illusion of a complete history where none exists.

Some of this illusion already exists in common AD&D® game situations. A centuries-old opponent is a living (or unliving) embodiment of all the years it has existed. What are the legends about this villain? What infamous deeds has he committed? Did he vanquish a legendary hero or two?

Likewise, most treasure is a tangible proof of history, a potential link to a hundred other characters and events from

the past. For whom was the object made? Did the artisan create it for love or money? Was it an ambassador's gift that united two warring kingdoms?

These are the simplest ways to sow a little history in your game, but you can easily create your own history seeds during the game. All you need is a little imagination and a notebook.

For instance, when your PCs enter a ruined temple that might otherwise have served only as window dressing, let one of them make an ancient history proficiency check. If it succeeds, tell them something like, "This look like one of the temples built in honor of the empress Dowager in the third dynasty," then jot yourself a note.

In later encounters, keep an eye on your history notes for a good opportunity to make a reference to the same piece of history. When they discover some ancient scrolls, you might tell the wizard PC that the scrolls date back to the time of that same Empress Dowager.

Now the PCs have encountered two tangible artifacts of the earlier time, and even if you don't have plans to link the scrolls to the temple somehow, the players will imagine a possible connection. Must the scrolls be read in the temple for some special effect? Is the key to understanding that final, cryptic spell found somewhere in the temple?

Yes, this method is world creation on the fly, but it works beautifully as long as you remain consistent—and the notebook does most of the work there. Give it a try, and tell us how it works for you.

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## Will the Real Conan Please Stand Up?

Dear *DRAGON*® Magazine, Peter Adkison, in issue #247, describes the primary motivating factor of the character of Conan as watching "Thulsa Doom destroy his village" and growing up plotting revenge as a result. One is forced to wonder what version of Conan Peter Adkison knows. Certainly it is not the version that Conan-creator Robert E. Howard wrote, because Howard never put pen to paper with a character of such laughable nomenclature as "Thulsa Doom." Many writers have borrowed the character and generally cast a pale reflection of the original. Perhaps the character is from the Schwarzenegger

Destiny—often throughout his stories, Howard foreshadowed Conan's eventual rise to kingship and glory in ways which made it clear that this was a man marked with greatness, whose destiny would fulfill all of that promise.

Another brief note on this column: Cyrano de Bergerac was more than a "great swordsman." He was also a great poet, a great lover, and a great scientist. In short, he strove to be great in everything, not just one thing. Of course, that's what true heroes are made of—as Adkison points out.

**Justin Bacon**

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## You say "Rakshasa," I say "Rakasta"

Dear Dave,

I'm sooo confused: On page 39 of *DRAGON Magazine* issue #247, the "Taltos" article describes rakshasas as "evil extra-planar creatures," yet you have 12 pages just preceding this on creating them as PCs.

I do like the style—and content—of the magazine. The inclusion of "Pro-Files" is interesting, as are the humorous author's blurbs at the end of each article. One column I would like to see return is the staffer's memories as gamers and some of the silly things their characters did. Ed Greenwood's memories (in "First Quest," in issue #218) touched me, for I know how it is to lose a loved one.

I'm sorry to hear that you miss *Robin of Sherwood*: Here in Billings, we have KUSM-TV (PBS/Missoula, MT) cabling-in *Robin Hood* with Richard Greene as Robin and Patricia Driscoll as Maid Marian. Corny by today's standards!

As for *Hercules* and *Xena*, the only things that interest me in their shows are the warrior-women costumes from Frederick's of Byzantium.

**Jerry Michele**  
Billings, MT

*Rakshasas and Rakasta are actually different creatures, but since they're both catlike and have similar names, it's easy to see where you'd be confused. (In fact, the creatures on which the AD&D® version of rakshasa are based aren't cat-headed, but the original drawing of the creature in the Monster Manual changed that.) Suffice to say that the Rakasta of Bruce Heard's article in issue #247 are not the evil shape-shifting spirits mentioned in Tom Moldvay's article.*

**C**yrano de Bergerac . . . strove to be great in everything, not just one thing.

movies—which I have never watched, not because I dislike Schwarzenegger but because I can tell by merely looking at them that they are untrue to their source material. Or the Marvel Comics version, which has gone far astray of its source material. Or perhaps the cartoon, which I will not even comment upon.

Nonetheless, what Adkison has done is watch or read an adaptation of a work and try to define the original in terms of it. Perhaps next month he shall treat us to a serious literary analysis of Victor Hugo's *Hunchback of Notre Dame* . . . based on his observations of the Disney movie. Or we may be treated to a mythological study of *Hercules* based on the current television show.

A far more appropriate category for the true Conan would be that of

*Thulsa Doom did indeed appear in the Marvel comics and in the first of the Conan movies. I can't say you're wrong that both of those versions of the Conan stories stray from Howard's original, but they each have their own charm. Some of the comics have been quite good.*

*One of the interesting things about heroes is how they transform throughout time. Think about how many variations of King Arthur have appeared throughout the centuries, some of them greater than others, depending on your personal taste—yet none truly the "original." In our faster, modern world, our heroes simply transform more quickly. It's easy to ignore the versions you don't like in favor of those you do. I, for instance, like to pretend that Prince of Thieves was never made.*



## Forgotten Favorites

Dear *DRAGON Magazine*,

On the topic of "forgotten realms" (mentioned in "The Wyrms' Turn" from issue #247), how can any printed setting be truly forgotten? Lately you have been asking us, the customers, what our favorite settings are and what out-of-print items we would like to see come back. I'm glad to see that some of the old settings are coming back, but what I'd like to know is, what would you like to see come back?

The game is driven as much by us as it is by you. All the articles are cool in the issues I've read, but since I've been reading this magazine, never once have I seen anything from you about what you like. When settings are mentioned, it's usually for the subject of the article and the author's involvement with that setting. What I'm really asking is when you're going to tell us what your favorite settings are.

On the subject of a 3rd edition, why? Isn't the 2nd edition good enough? I thought that the psionics presented in the *S&P* book (taken from the *DARK SUN*® setting) work well. My only complaint is that I don't think that psionics is something that only one character class should have. Psionic ability is something that normally a person is born with or develops over a period of time or rapidly through some traumatic event. If anything, a new set of rules should be created to allow for this. A true psionist

is someone who has had his or her powers for quite some time. By the definition given in the class description, these psionists have developed their powers, giving them greater control over their gifts. But what about wild talents whose powers were created through critical events? They would have no control, but shouldn't they have that chance of containing an awesome power that has a tendency to create a major problem for the character? This would be closer to the individual who "develops" a psychic power and has never lived with it.

For the magic system, how about a control factor? Even the greatest wizard has a chance of bungling a spell now and then, and I'm not talking about being attacked or otherwise having their concentration broken in the heat of battle. The current rules assume that the wizard has complete control over the target area of the spell as well as the power of the spell as listed in the spell's description. If a wizard casting a *magic missile* spell is jarred during the casting, wouldn't it be more likely that control of the spell would be lost than have those built-up energies just dissipate?

As for new spells and magical items, enough already! Well, at least for a little while. How about articles devoted solely to the applications of spells? Some of the spells I've read leave me more confused than when I read the title of it. Since I can't see any practical use for them, I disallow them in my campaign.

And lastly, since you've packed all the info for the *RAVENLOFT*® and *GREYHAWK*® campaigns into hard-bound books, what about the *MYSTARA*® and *SPELLJAMMER*® settings? Since I keep running into refer-

ences to both of these settings, you've left me to wonder if they are going to return or not. If not, why do you tease those of us who at the time couldn't afford the settings by referring to them in some of your articles?

SPC RichardT. Balsley Jr.

Fort Riley, KS

xan@oz-online.net

*As for the favorite settings of the magazine staff, I confessed mine (the *AL-QADIM*® campaign) in issue #244. Chris pines for the return of the *SPELLJAMMER* setting, which he used as the basis for his home campaign back in the Great White North, and Jesse's favorite is the *RAVENLOFT* setting (which would probably come in second if I were to make a list of my own). Despite our own preferences, though, we always try to make sure that most of the articles in any issue of the magazine are useful to players of a "standard" AD&D campaign setting—and for that purpose, we consider the *GREYHAWK*, *FORGOTTEN REALMS*, and *MYSTARA* settings to be close to "standard" AD&D, since they are each fairly close to center in what has become the "typical" AD&D campaign.*

*On the other hand, we don't want to ignore fans of "forgotten" settings, so we try to strike a balance with an occasional article for players of the currently inactive *DARK SUN* and *Masque of the Red Death* campaigns, for example. Parts of even the most campaign-specific articles might be useful in your own campaign. Try "Seeds of Evil" in this issue, and see whether you can use a new creature or spell from it in your own game.*

*If you're looking for out of print campaign material, try used book stores, game stores, and conventions. That's where we find 'em.*

By Aaron Williams







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## Fantasy Only!

Dear *Dragon Magazine*,

I am 22 years old, and I have been playing/GMing for 10 years. I enjoy all genres of roleplaying.

While skimming through “D-Mail” in issue #247, I came across something that should have caught my eye in #246. It appears that you asked us, the readers, what *ALTERNITY*® articles we would like to see in future issues. Well, I do not want to see any.

I have been a *Dragon Magazine* subscriber for 4 years now, and I look toward it supplying me with ideas I can use in my fantasy campaigns. I thoroughly enjoy the features and look forward to “Wyrms of the North,” “Rogue’s Gallery,” “Bazaar of the Bizarre,” “The Wizards Three,” and even “Out of Character.” I have always felt that *Dragon Magazine* has been a supplement for the AD&D and D&D® games, not a supplement for dice games, card games, or any games that are not fantasy roleplaying, even if they are published by TSR. I feel betrayed when I open my magazine and see articles that do not pertain to me.

I did look through the *ALTERNITY* fast-play rules. However, I was not drawn to the game in any way. I was a little peeved that there was a “do it yourself” *ALTERNITY* adventure the next issue. That space could have been devoted to something to do with an AD&D game world.

I have been trying to think of ways to circumvent the cancelation of my subscription. One idea is to create a new magazine devoted entirely to the *ALTERNITY* game, maybe not the same size as *Dragon Magazine*, so *ALTERNITY* players can afford both magazines. Another suggestion is to create books like the *ALTERNITY* fast rules and ship them with the *Dragon Magazine*. What I am trying to say is that a *Dragon Magazine* is not worth the money if it contains articles of no use to me.

Michael Seymour  
Jackson, NJ



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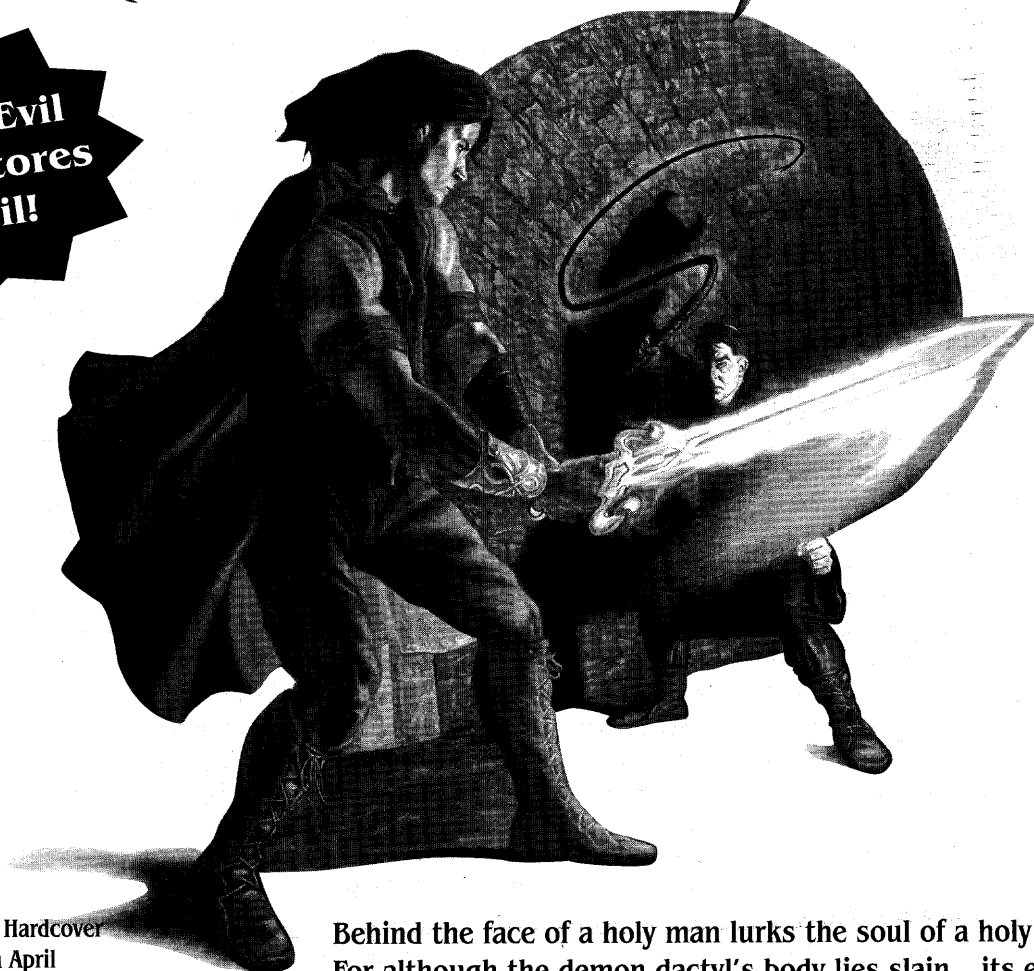
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## Question of the Month

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What optional rules from the AD&D® game *Player's Handbook* and *DUNGEON MASTER® Guide* do you never use? Why?

### How To Fix It

Paul Hoyak's letter in *DRAGON*® Magazine issue #247 has finally moved me to throw my gauntlet into the ring on the issue of a possible 3rd edition for the AD&D® game. Contrary to what he says, a third edition of the game not only is necessary but also has the potential to vastly improve and revitalize the game.

**W**ith the advent of kits, what exactly is the distinction between a sub-class and a kit?

The D&D game, in one incarnation or another, is 25 years old. In an industry where trends advance nearly as quickly as in the computer industry, that's ancient—and despite a host of cosmetic changes, starting with the 1st edition of AD&D and ending with the *Skills & Powers* add-on, the core systems of the game are largely unchanged. Not only is the current system, in my opinion, not taking advantage of recent advances in "game system technology," but also it is a staggering behemoth. For example, almost no one would argue that kits are integral to the 2nd edition, and there are few who would not admit that, if the *S&P* are actually what we want, then they should be part of the main system as well. Much like the situation the 1st-edition system was in when the second edition came along, the 2nd edition now has too many rules spread over too many books.

What needs fixing? Well, a good way to answer that question is to look at what should be kept. There's a "spirit" to a game that must be retained. For example, releasing a 3rd edition of AD&D as a clone of *Vampire: The Masquerade*\* wouldn't really be a 3rd edition of the game—yet not to realize that there are elements of newer games that could improve AD&D if incorporated

into it is a supreme act of arrogance and blindness. So what's essential, and what's excess fat that can be trimmed and improved?

**The Name:** "Advanced" DUNGEONS & DRAGONS®. Advanced compared to what exactly? There is no D&D game now. This new edition should drop the "Advanced" appellation—be simply the 3rd Edition of D&D. Or perhaps, if we wanted to recognize the longer history of the game, jump up to 5th Edition D&D, to pick a nicely-sized number.

**Attributes:** There are six attributes in the D&D game. There always have been, and I think to change them, add to them, or remove some of them would be a mistake. Strength, Intelligence, Dexterity, Constitution, Wisdom, and Charisma. It's one of the first things you learn about the game, and it's one of the first things you memorize about it.

**Classes/Kits:** Bill Logan, also writing

in issue #247, had an interesting comment about character classes, noting that sub-classes such as the paladin are confusing. I agree. With the advent of kits, what exactly is the distinction between a sub-class and a kit? Why can't a paladin just be a fighter with a kit? Rangers and druids, however, are significantly different from fighters and clerics, and I feel they deserve classes of their own to be customized with kits of their own.

Psionics should either part of the game or should not be part of the game—they should be relegated to a separate sourcebook. This would mean there would be six or seven classes—warrior, wizard, cleric, rogue, ranger, druid, and possibly psionicist—and as many kits as the fervid imagination of the gamer can create to customize those classes.

**Races:** Leave the list alone.

**Proficiencies:** Proficiencies suffer from the same confusion of the class/kit distinction. When is a skill a proficiency? When is it a class ability? Well, the real answer is that there is no distinction, or at least there shouldn't be one. Scrap the proficiency system and institute a full-scale skill system. More on this later.

**Magic:** There are many things about the D&D magic system that are admirable. There are many things that are not. Over the 25 years of D&D, there have been hundreds upon hundreds of fan revisions to the spell system. Finding a way to revise the old system to make it more up to date and effective while still staying true to the spirit of D&D will be



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neither easy nor simple. This is not a task to be shirked, but it is a complicated issue and should be delved into separately.

**Combat:** There are many things about the D&D combat system that are admirable. There are many things that are not. Over the 25 years of . . . oh wait, we've been here before. See "Magic," above.

**Character Creation:** D&D has always been a game that is very easy to learn, and it should definitely remain that way. D&D is the primary RPG most people outside of the hobby know about, and it is still the way most gamers come into the hobby. It would be a tragic mistake to fix the problems of the current system, only to make it so complicated and difficult to learn for newcomers that we guarantee there will be no more. The character creation system needs to be laid out in two tiers—one a very simple, step-by-step process so that a newcomer can get into the game as easily as they

get into *Monopoly*. A second introduces the more complicated elements of the system.

#### First Tier

Step One: Roll dice to generate six attributes.

Step Two: Pick class.

Step Three: Pick kit. (Optional.)

Step Four: Pick race.

Step Five: Buy equipment.

Step Six: Play.

Remember when the game was this simple? I miss those days.

#### Second Tier

In the second tier, a point system replaces the random generation of attributes. Another set of points, or perhaps points drawn from the same pool depending on how the system is designed, would be used to purchase classes and kits. A skill system would also be instituted. Any ability of a class

or a kit, plus additional abilities such as those currently detailed under the proficiency system, would be purchasable. This system would replace the current morass of dual- and multi-classing. If you wanted the ability to fight with a sword and the ability to pick locks, you would simply spend the points the way you wanted.

Step One: Purchase attributes.

Step Two: Purchase class. (Optional.)

Step Three: Purchase kit. (Optional.)

Step Four: Pick race.

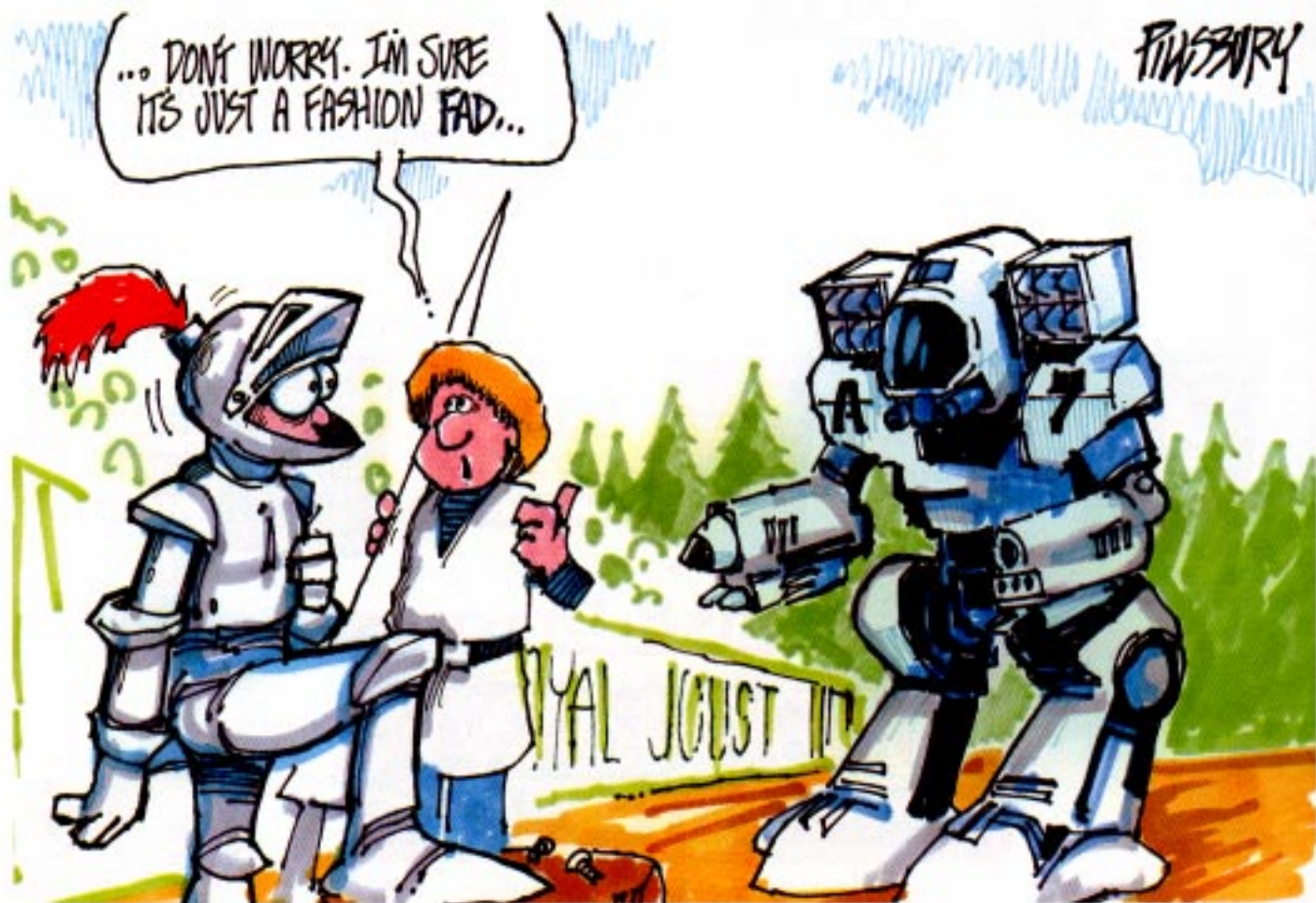
Step Five: Purchase additional skills.

Step Six: Buy equipment.

Step Seven: Play.

Experience points would be used to purchase new skills. You might even leave the old level system intact by letting players simply purchase a new level in their class with experience, raising all the skills that make up that class.

By Joe Pillsbury





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**Nitpicky Rules:** There are many rules in AD&D that make little sense. For example, the particular bonuses and penalties to various attributes that your selection of race makes—even if most elves are more intelligent, why is your elf more intelligent as a result? The entire system should be streamlined, removing rules such as these, which merely clutter the system and provide a goldmine of opportunities for abusive rule lawyers.

There are still those out there who hold that the 1st edition was perfect and that the 2nd edition is a joke. Struggle as I might, I can't understand the position they're coming from. I am sure there are those who think the 2nd edition is the best thing since sliced bread and that there is no way to improve it. I can't understand their point of view, either, but I do know that the 3rd edition isn't really for them at all—it's for those of us who do see the current system as flawed.

**Justin Bacon**  
triad@prairie.lakes.com

**T**his poor soon-to-be expired kobold might . . . decide to use that special card he'd been saving just in case Lord Soth showed up.

### House Rule: Species Enemies

For several years I've tried getting into print a little house rule of mine that I thought other gamers would find worthwhile. It concerns species enemies. Why should it be limited to only one creature (and with such a high bonus)?

I have a character we'll call Starbryn. Starbryn lives in the southeastern section of Southwood, where his tribe has had to deal with incursions of goblins. Let's say that a combined force of goblins, hobgoblins, orcs, and gnolls makes it through the outer perimeter and slays his family. Starbryn is a young, untested ranger, and he comes upon the aftermath of their carnage. In terms of character development, this is where we'd say that Starbryn chooses a species enemy. Which does he choose?

He knows who was involved in the attacks. Perhaps "Eenie-meenie-minie-moe, which one do I make my foe?" I don't think so.

Looking at the situation from a psychological perspective, Starbryn would likely hate all four types equally. Looking at the rules on choosing a species enemy, it seems clear that hatred is a big factor in the species-enemy rule, not just experience at fighting a particular creature.

Okay, I'm making it too complicated. Simply put, there are times when a character has a reason to choose a group of creatures. What I suggest is splitting the Species Enemy benefit into two choices: Specific Species Enemy and General Species Enemy.

What are the benefits of this division? Well, with the General Species Enemy the ranger gains a +2 to attack/damage rolls when dealing with any of the creatures belonging to a certain group. They still retain the same level of hatred from their enemies (4 on reaction rolls), but their bonus is understandably reduced in light of how many creatures are eligible for the bonus. Here's a list of creature groups that I consider to be eligible for

the General Species Enemy category:

1. Goblind (goblins, orcs, hobgoblins, gnolls, etc.).
2. Giants.
3. Giantkin.
4. Undead.
5. Drowkin (drow, driders, chitines).
6. Spiders (or perhaps drow and spiders).
7. Troll and trollkin.

You get the point. There must be a reasonable connection among the chosen creatures to consider them a group for a General Species Enemy bonus. They can even be members of two or three interlocked organizations, though in all cases the player should be able to give the DM a good reason for his use of a General Species Enemy, so long as it fits within the story of the character.

For example, Starbryn should be able to choose goblind for his Species Enemy, but there's nothing in his early background that would justify his

choosing giants instead.

So there you have it, folks. Look it over, and write in with what you think.

**Chris Perry**  
Coming, CA

### Chance vs. Fate

I feel moved to comment on Chris Merrit's letter in *DRAGON Magazine* issue #244, concerning the standard AD&D vs. SAGA® combat systems.

I agree with his comment that "whether you hit or miss when you attack is mostly chance," but isn't that the whole point? THAC0 represents how good a character is at hitting someone or something—THAC0 represents fighting skills, if you like, so it necessarily contains an element of chance.

For example, Ferdinand the 4th-level fighter needs a base 15 to hit his heavily armored opponent sporting an armor class of 2. Ferdinand is going to hit his foe well enough to inflict damage only 25 percent of the time, or one blow in four. The d20 clatters across the table and . . . a hit! A palpable hit! But lucky? No, simply an application of the laws of probability. Ferdinand can't hit this foe every time (or even very often), but at least each time he tries, all things being equal, he has the same chance of doing so, and as his skill improves (as he goes up in levels), his chances get better and better.

This isn't "roll"-playing; it is simply an action of game mechanics . . . "roll"-playing would be when the player eked the last positive modifier the rules allowed and then proceeded to begin every single encounter with Ferdinand drawing his sword.

DM: "The old peasant stumbles down the road toward you, weighed down beneath a bundle of firewood over his left shoulder."

Player: "Ferdinand moves to the peasant's right to reduce the likelihood of the firewood being used as an effective shield and attacks."

Or even...

DM: "The blind beggar rattles his cup as Ferdinand approaches."

Player: "That's 4 on his AC isn't it? (reaches for a d20)."

See the excellent "Knights of the Dinner Table" for further examples.

The SAGA system, on the other hand, which allows players to choose whether to play a high- or low-numbered card to resolve the action, stretches my credibility. If you're faced by the lowliest kobold, why try any less hard than against something truly nasty? It's still your skin at stake, after all, and kobolds have a truly nasty habit of turning out to be *polymorphed* ogres just when you least expect it. In any event, this poor soon-to-be expired kobold might conclude that *his* cards are up (if you'll excuse the pun) and decide to use that special card he'd been saving just in case Lord Soth showed up.

Why try any less harder? Certainly you'd use different tactics against foes that are not as immediately perilous to your continued good health. Facing the aforementioned kobold, you might keep half an eye out on the off chance that it is an ambush, and that the rest of the tribe aren't lurking in the bushes, whereas against Lord Soth one doesn't really

have time for such niceties. When you're trying to keep life and limb together, it is a foolish warrior indeed that would do less than his best against any foe.

Chris's "roll"-playing vs. "role"-playing point, however, is well made—characters should be played as personalities, not as one-dimensional, and definitely not as a procession of high- or low-numbered cards to influence hand-to-hand combat as is deemed tactically advantageous. There's a joke there somewhere about "playing your cards right," but I won't push my luck.

**Kevin McMahon**  
Kelmscott, Western Australia

### The Best Weapons

I've been an AD&D player and Dungeon Master for about eight years now, and I feel compelled to answer your Question of the Month about weapons (from issue #245), as my gaming group has had problems with the weapons list in the past.

I am also a history major and an amateur military historian, so the inconsistencies with many of the AD&D game's weapons seem especially clear to me. The most apparent—and possibly the least important—errors to me occur in the weight listings. (I've never had to be very strict with the encumbrance rules.) Medieval weapons do not weigh anywhere near 10 lbs. A two-handed sword certainly does not weigh 15 lbs.; a more realistic weight would be closer to 6 lbs. Most single-handed weapons, including swords, would weigh around 3 lbs. These weapons needed to be light enough to use throughout a prolonged battle. If you've ever hoisted a real sword, you'd agree that 3 lbs. of blade and pommel are quite heavy enough.

More significant for AD&D players is the damage dealt by each of these weapons. Ignoring reality for a moment, how many players do you know who have actually chose a spear as their primary weapon? I don't know very many.

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I have had problems in the past with a player whose characters all seem to have an unnatural genetic preference for the charms of the bastard sword. After all, it is a weapon that has many advantages. It inflicts significant damage and can be used both single- and double-handed. Historically however, "bastard" swords were not very common, appearing during the later years of the 13th century as armor began to get heavier. Normal "long" swords were much more common. But by far the most common weapon, throughout the Dark Ages and the first half of the Middle Ages, was the spear. It has many advantages over the sword. Most importantly, it is much cheaper to make. It can be afforded my men (such as militia, fyrd, or the rank and file of Viking bands) who could not hope to afford metal armor or swords. The spear has a good reach in hand-to-hand combat. You can hide your body behind your shield while you use your spear, exposing only your arm as you thrust out with the spear-point. A spear

can easily be thrown as a missile weapon, something that a sword cannot do. And when your spear hits home, it inflicts a serious wound. Most heavy spears (those meant to be used in hand-to-hand combat) have wide blades, about two inches near the base. These blades inflict as serious a wound as the thrust of a sword.

The longbow vs. crossbow problem is another area that needs serious help. Heavy crossbows could have draw weights of 1,000 lbs. or more. A medium crossbow, with the help of a "goat's foot" (an iron bar used to lever the string back) could have a draw weight of perhaps 170 lbs. If the heaviest longbows had pulls of about 100 lbs., how do you justify the pathetic damage of the crossbow? I try to arm my warriors with realistic weaponry.

Currently over half of my group members arm themselves with spears, at least as a secondary weapon. And, while he still refuses to use a spear, my stubborn friend has given up his bastard sword. Making weapon damage more

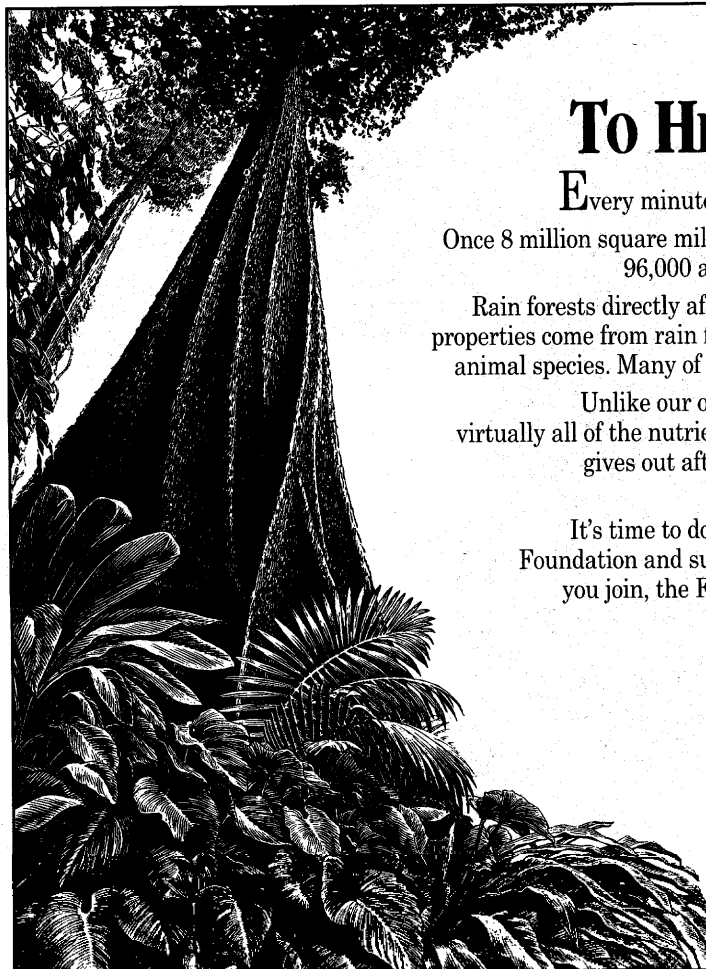
equitable would eliminate his problem. My personal modifications have helped him. Players would be attracted to a greater variety of weapons if they didn't feel "under-gunned" when compared to swordsmen or longbowmen. Axes, maces, warhammers, and spears were all deadly weapons that worked quite well. That lethality should be reflected in the rules. Death to min-maxing! Long live a varied weapon selection!

Adam Donaldson

Spokane WA



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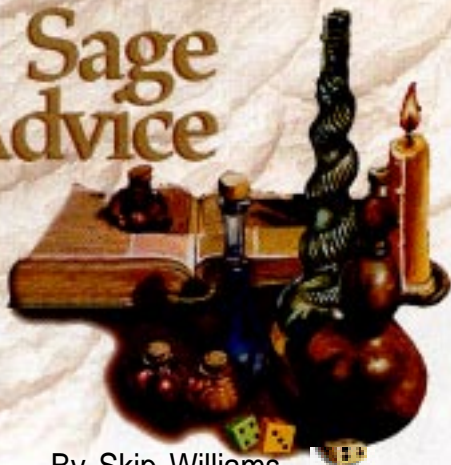
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# Sage Advice



By Skip Williams

*This month, the Sage ponders a few peculiarities, both magical and mundane, from the AD&D® game.*

The *Player's Handbook* says a character with the juggling proficiency can catch thrown daggers or darts if a successful hit roll vs. AC 0 is made. What about arrows? Arrows are larger (a longer wooden shaft to catch) and slower speed factor (if the bow's speed is taken) than daggers or darts.

No, juggling doesn't allow a character to catch arrows. An arrow might be longer than a dart or arrow, but it's also one heck of a lot skinnier. A bow might take longer to aim than a dart or dagger, but an arrow flies much faster than a thrown weapon.

One of the optional restrictions for a fighter created using the Skills & Powers rules is a limit on magical armor. Does this restriction also prohibit magical shields?

If you choose "armor" as a magical item restriction, shields are out, too.

Note that you can only gain extra CPs for a restriction once. If you've already claimed 15 CPs for wearing no armor at all, you cannot also claim CPs for not using magical armor.

I'm having difficulty with the nautical combat system from the *Of Ships and the Sea* book. In the maneuvering phase, under Table 13, who is the "acting ship" (A)? How do you decide this? It can't be the PCs (or DM) all the time, because that will exclude each side from certain results on the table. Likewise, it can't be the ship who won that

maneuvering phase roll, since the entire right side of the table won't be needed because A will always be greater than B.

Ship A is always the ship taking the action (whatever that may be, ship B is always the other ship. Usually, you'll need to check Table 13 twice, once for each ship. If both flee or both close, don't use the table; the distance between them changes according to their movement rates. (They might overshoot each other if closing, but that should put them close enough to try boarding or ramming the next round.) In cases where results from the table are contradictory, use only the result the winning ship achieves.

The *Spells & Magic* book contains several new wizard proficiencies (page 52) and new priest proficiencies (page 59). The base abilities listed for these skills on the table work fine if you're using the old proficiency rules, but the Skills & Powers rules allow you to use subabilities to determine adjustments. Which subabilities go with which new proficiencies?

Relevant subabilities for the new wizard proficiencies are: alchemy Intelligence/Knowledge; anatomy Intelligence/Knowledge; arcanology Intelligence/Knowledge; bookbinding Intelligence/Reason; concentration Wisdom/Willpower; dowsing Wisdom/Intuition; glassblowing Dexterity/Aim; hypnotism Charisma/Leadership; mental resistance Wisdom/Willpower; omen reading Wisdom/Intuition; papermaking Intelligence/Reason; prestidigitation Dexterity/Aim; research Intelligence/

Reason; sage knowledge Intelligence/Knowledge; scribe Dexterity/Aim; tactics of magic Intelligence/Reason; thaumaturgy Intelligence/Knowledge.

Relevant subabilities for the new priest proficiencies are: administration Intelligence/Knowledge; alms Charisma/Leadership; bookbinding Intelligence/Reason; bureaucracy Intelligence/Knowledge; ceremony Wisdom/Intuition; diplomacy Charisma/Leadership; investigation Intelligence/Reason; law Intelligence/Knowledge; observation Intelligence/Reason; omen reading Wisdom/Intuition; oratory Charisma/Leadership; papermaking Intelligence/Reason; persuasion Charisma/Leadership; sage knowledge Intelligence/Knowledge; scribe Dexterity/Aim; undead lore Intelligence/Knowledge.

In the *Spells & Magic* spell-point system, what subability governs bonus spell points for a wizard? What subability governs bonus spell points for a priest?

Wizards use Intelligence/Knowledge. Priests use Wisdom/Intuition.

If a wild mage casts a sending spell, and he rolls a wild surge, presumably he is the caster of the spell and the target is the person receiving the message. Fine, but does this mean the wild mage can attempt a sending spell using Nahal's reckless dweomer and blast a hapless victim on the other side of the planet with wild surges? Sure, a wild surge might hit the caster instead of the subject, but there's about a 50/50 chance the subject is hit instead,

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First, wild surges occur only when the spell in question has some level-based variable. Sending has no such variables (though a wild surge could occur if a wild mage tries to duplicate the effect with *Nahal's reckless dweomer*).

When a wild mage casts a spell whose target or subject lies out of the wild mage's direct sight (as might be the case with *clairvoyance*, *clairaudience*, and *sending* spells), I recommend that you treat the wild mage as the center of any wild surge result that might occur. In such a case, a wild surge result that affects only the spell's target or subject have no visible effects, but a wild surge result that affects an area always includes the wild mage.

- The human "tough hide" ability, also from *Skills & Powers*.
- The swashbuckler kit's +2 AC bonus from *Skills & Powers*.
- The swashbuckler kit's AC bonus, when lightly armored, from the *Complete Fighter's Handbook*.
- The ironskin ability from the *Complete Ninja's Handbook*.

The first two items on your list are actually the same thing. Early printings of the *Skills & Powers* book contain an erroneous reference to this skill on page 15 (under the Balance heading). Warriors and rogues can buy this skill as a class ability for 10 character points. The error

How do you restore the spells in the ring of *spell storing*? Some people I play with say that you have to go through the laborious recharging process and others say that you are restoring the spells, not charging the ring therefore, a spell must simply be cast into the ring. At what level would a recharged spell function (for purposes of duration, resistance to dispel attempts, and other level-based variables)? Can the ring's owner change the spells in it?

Anyone can recharge the ring—provided the character knows and can cast the spells the ring can hold. The character recharging the spell has to expend any necessary material components and suffers any negative effects that come with casting the spell normally.

A recharged spell functions at the recharger's level or level 12, whichever is less.

The spells a *ring of spell storing* can hold are fixed when the ring is created; the ring's owner cannot change them.

The *Player's Handbook* says specialist wizards cannot use magical items that duplicate spells from their opposition schools. What about *rings of spell storing*? For example, can an invoker use a *Melf's acid arrow* (a Conjuraton spell) from a *ring of spell storing*?

Since anyone can use a *ring of spell storing*, any specialist wizard can use the spells in it. As "Sage Advice" has pointed out before, the rule in question (which appears in the specialist wizard section of Chapter 3 in the *PHB*) should say specialist wizards cannot use wizard-only magical items that duplicate spells from opposition schools. An invoker could not use a *wand of conjuration* to summon monsters. Nor could an invoker recharge a *Melf's acid arrow* spell stored in a *ring of spell storing* (because the invoker could not cast the spell, see previous question).

In the *Complete Psionicist Handbook*, it says *antimagic shells* have no effects on psionics. However, in *High-Level Campaigns*, it says *antimagic shell* blocks the use of psionics. I assume then that the official ruling from TSR for its game worlds is that all psionics are blocked by *antimagic shell*? As a DM, I believe

## How do you store the spells in a *ring of spell storing*?

The description for the *wildshield* spell says that it can protect the caster from harmful wild surges. Does this mean that a wild mage so protected can cast *Nahal's reckless dweomer* and be protected from any detrimental effects the *Nahal's reckless dweomer* might have?

Also, what happens if a wild mage casts *Nahal's reckless dweomer* while under the influence of a *chaos shield* spell?

I'm inclined to suggest that *wildshield* will not absorb the caster's own spells or wild surges.

Technically, a *chaos shield* protects the caster against his or her own wild surges, including surges from *Nahal's reckless dweomer*. If you fear this might lead to player abuse, it's okay to rule that *chaos shield* prevents a character from creating and manipulating the surge of energy *Nahal's reckless dweomer* produces, rendering the spell useless as long as the *chaos shield* lasts.

Which of the following defensive abilities work when a character using them is also using a shield or kote?

- The +2 AC bonus the *Skills & Powers* book grants to unarmored rogues and warriors.
- The fighter's optional defense ability from *Skills & Powers*.

has been corrected in later printings of the book. Although a shield is technically a type of armor, it's okay to treat a character using a shield, but wearing no body armor, as unarmored. A kote is a type of body armor (worn on the arms and shoulders) and negates this ability.

The tough hide ability grants a character a base AC 8. A shield can improve this by 1. A kote used with this ability follows the rules for armor use on page 36 of the *Skills & Powers* book.

Shields and kotes work fine with any swashbuckler's AC bonus, provided the character isn't wearing any additional armor that would negate the bonus.

Any type of body armor, including a kote, negates a ninja's ironskin bonus, but the character can still use a shield.

What happens when an ageless or immortal creature, such as a lich, shade, or avangion, casts a spell that causes magical aging?

Nothing; immortal or ageless creatures ignore aging effects. Note, however, any aging side effects from spell casting are meant to represent the terrible strain casting a powerful spell places on the caster's body and psyche. Even an ageless creature is required to pass a system shock roll to survive the ordeal (see the Constitution section of Chapter 1 in the *PHB*).



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**this change occurred because playtesting showed psionics to be too powerful against antimagic shells.**

*Antimagic shell* does stop psionics; the material in *High-Level Campaigns* corrects the *Complete Psionicist's Handbook*. One reason is, as you suggest, to help give non-psionic characters a defense against psionics. Another reason is that *antimagic shell* is a sovereign defense that stops spells, spell-like abilities, and all kinds of attacks that are not "magical" per se, such as breath weapons and gaze attacks.

**D**oes the 5th layer of a *prismatic spell* block psionics since it blocks "mental attacks"?

**Does the 5th layer of a *prismatic sphere* (the indigo layer) block psionics since it blocks "mental attacks?" Does the Suppress Magic psionic power have any effect on a *prismatic sphere*? (*Antimagic shell* doesn't.) This question has caused much furious debate and confusion for me and other gamers.**

A *prismatic sphere's* 5th layer blocks all forms of telepathic attacks. (By definition, telepathic attacks are "mental" attacks.) The 2nd layer stops psychokinetic attacks, and the 7th layer stops pretty much everything, including psionic attacks. I'd allow Suppress Magic to drop the 7th layer, which is vulnerable to *dispel magic*, but not any other layer. You might want to make other layers vulnerable to psionic powers that produce effects similar to the spells that negate them. A Ballistic Attack, for example, might negate the 5th layer, which is vulnerable to *magic missile*.

**What happens to RAVENLOFT® goblins when the master that created them has died? Do the goblins maintain their telepathic link? Or is it broken? Does the most powerful goblin become the master? Do they all become independent and capable of self-determination? Can they remember their existence from before their transformation? Can they be transformed back into their original form? Can another master "adopt" these orphan goblins?**

Goblins lose their telepathic linkage and become independent creatures (much like regular goblins, though not quite as smart) if they lose their masters. It could be possible for new masters to "adopt" masterless goblins; domain lords probably can accomplish this.

**On which Outer Planes do the deities from the AL-QADIM® setting (Hajama, Kor, Jisan, etc.) dwell? Where do the deceased from that campaign go when they go to "Paradise" or "Hell," as mentioned in some of the products?**

Unless specifically stated otherwise, deities dwell on the outer planes corresponding to their alignments (see DMG, Chapter 15). Likewise, the spirits of dead characters are assumed to go to the planes of their alignments. The alignment for each plane is as follows:

*Mount Celestial* – Lawful Good; *Bytopia* – Neutral (Lawful) Good; *Elysium* – Neutral Good; *The Beastlands* – Chaotic (Neutral) Good; *Arborea* – Chaotic Good; *Ysgard* – Neutral (Chaotic) Good; *Limbo* – Chaotic Neutral; *Pandemonium* – Chaotic (Evil) Neutral; *The Abyss* – Chaotic Evil; *Carceri* – Chaotic (Neutral) Evil; *The Gray Waste* – Neutral (Lawful) Evil; *Gehenna* – Neutral Evil; *Baator* – Lawful Evil; *Acheron* – Lawful (Neutral) Evil; *Mechanus* – Lawful Neutral; *Arcadia* – Lawful (Neutral) Good; *The Outlands* – Neutral.

A parenthetical entry indicates a secondary tendency. For example, the inhabitants of Arcadia have a slightly neutral bent.

**The ogre mage description says the creature can fly for 12 turns each day. Is that a power he can turn on and off at will until he uses the full 12 turns? Or is it a one-time shot?**

The ogre mage can use the power one time a day. Once the power is activated it ceases functioning 12 turns (two hours) later. During that time the creature can fly or not, as it desires. Time spent on the ground while the power is "running" still counts against the duration.

**Suppose a character casts *phantasmal force* or a similar spell in an outdoor setting, and concentrates on a barn owl as the illusion. The character can make the owl fly anywhere within the area of the spell effect, 400 square feet plus 100 square feet per level. The spell doesn't have cubic area, so there is no height restriction on this spell? Or can the caster could make the owl fly as high as he likes providing the image still looks realistic?**

Yes, the illusory owl can move freely throughout the spell's area of effect.

I'd suggest making the area a maximum of five feet high per three caster levels. Note that the whole area can be turned on its side or reconfigured as the caster wishes, and also that it can be created anywhere within range.

**The description for the spell *Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion* stipulates an area of only 300 square feet per caster level, and a character can imagine that her mansion has two or three stories to house the numerous rooms mentioned, especially since the description says the design and interior of the space created can be altered to suit the caster's wishes. My players always try to create a mansion of maximum ground floor size. For example, a 14th-level wizard gets 4,200 square feet (14x300) which then has a large number of stories, each of which has the same floor area, because there is no height limitation included in the spell description.**

In this case, "square feet" refers to the mansion's total floor space. The caster can create multiple stories, but the floor space in each counts toward the limit. You can assume any particular story's ceiling height cannot exceed half the area's longest dimension, or 10 feet, whichever is higher.



*Skip Williams has professed a need for Mordenkainen's magnificent mansion after struggling through early spring yard work at his Seattle-area home.*

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# Out of Character

By Peter Adkison

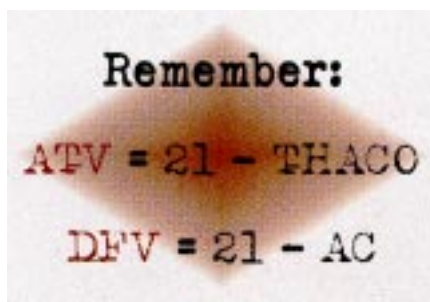
## Simplifying THAC0 and Armor Class

One of the most important improvements of 2nd Edition AD&D® over 1st Edition was the concept of THAC0 (To Hit Armor Class 0). By calculating ahead of time what a character needed to roll on 1d20 to hit AC 0, a player can roll the die and call out what armor class he or she hit. The reason this is so important is that the DM can look at the AC of the target and know whether the character hit without having to cross-reference a chart. This speeds up game play without changing the rules, just the method for resolving the rule.

Unfortunately, the THAC0 system could have been even better. The problem with THAC0 dates back to the awkwardness of having armor class values start off at 10 and go down as they improve. So, the better your armor, the lower your armor class.

Unfortunately, this system is very non-intuitive. Since THAC0 is the number you need to hit AC 0, it's not a trivial exercise to figure out what you need to hit AC 4, for instance. Most players can eventually memorize the rule that, if they roll 1d20 and subtract it from their THAC0, the result indicates what armor class they hit. And most DMs can eventually get used to this well enough that if a player calls out, "I hit AC -3," then that means they hit if the target has an AC of -2 and miss if the target has an AC of 4. But even though this works, and it seems like it should become intuitive, many DMs and players I know struggle with this even after using it for years.

If you're searching for something a bit more intuitive, especially for beginners, perhaps you'd be interested in how I run things in my campaign.



I have replaced THAC0 with a value called Attack Value (ATV), which—just like THAC0—is a measurement of how good a character is at hitting something. This is basically the inverse of THAC0 in that it starts off at 1 for all characters and goes up over time, so that an ATV of 2 is better than a 1, and a 3 is better yet. The equation for calculating ATV is simply  $21 - \text{THAC0}$ . Each point of ATV is equivalent to +1 to hit, so if a character picks up a +1 for some reason, like a *prayer* spell, simply increase the ATV by one.

I have replaced armor class (AC) with a value called Defense Value (DFV), which, just like AC, is a measurement of how good a character is at avoiding damage in combat. This is basically the inverse of AC in that it starts off at 11 for all characters and improves depending on armor, Dexterity, magic, and so on—just as AC does—so a DFV of 12 is better than a 11, and a 13 is better yet. The

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equation for calculating DFV is simply  $21 - \text{AC}$ . And each point of DFV is equivalent to a +1 bonus to AC, so if AC improves by +1 for some reason, like if the character picks up a shield in the middle of an adventure, simply increase the DFV by one.

Since this requires one more calculation than the current system (assuming you calculate THAC0 and AC first instead of developing a shortcut to calculate these directly), this takes slightly longer to set up. But if I can make one more calculation for a character that makes it easier to DM the character later on, I'll take that trade any day! The true beauty of this system lies in how fast and intuitive it is to use on the combat field. Behold!

Using ATV and DFV, when a character rolls 1d20 to hit, he or she simply adds (which is easier and more intuitive than subtracts) the d20 roll to the character's ATV. If this total equals or exceeds the DFV of the target, it's a hit.

Check it out! As with anything new, it'll take a few rounds to get used to it, but once your players see how much faster this is, they'll never want to go back!



*As the CEO of WotC/TSR, Peter has considered assigning an ATV and DFV to each of his managers and using 1d20 for conflict resolution, but the Human Resources department has advised against it.*



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by James Wyatt

illustrated by  
Roger Raupp



# Seeds Of Evil

Untold centuries ago, a nameless force of pure evil broke through dimensional barriers and entered the world known now as Gothic Earth.

AS ITS POWER SPREAD, THE FORCE CORRUPTED THE VERY ESSENCE OF MAGIC, BENDING IT TO EVIL, AND SIMULTANEOUSLY CORRUPTED ALL WHO PRACTICED MAGIC.

Spellcasters and others transformed into supernatural horrors, and the humans of Gothic Earth became prey for these monstrosities. The evil force became known as the Red Death, and the struggle against its influence in Gothic Earth's 1890s is the focus of the *Masque of the Red Death* game. The history of the Red Death's ever-expanding influence is outlined in *A Guide to Gothic Earth*, the rulebook for *Masque of the Red Death*. This chronicle tells of an ongoing struggle between the minions of the Red Death and the brave souls who have

resisted its influence throughout the ages. Sometimes working alone, sometimes organized into qabals to share knowledge and power, these heroes at various times in history have won important battles, thwarting the schemes of evil in the world.

This article, in combination with TSR's Historical Reference (HR) series of campaign sourcebooks (*Vikings*, *Charlemagne's Paladins*, *Celts*, *A Mighty Fortress*, *The Glory of Rome*, *Age of Heroes*, and *The Crusades*), allows players and Dungeon Masters (DMs) an opportunity to play out the conflict between good and evil in many ages and places through the history of Gothic Earth. The material in this article can also be used for inspiration in any AD&D campaign.



## Using This Article

*In a historical campaign:* The material in this article can lend an aura of gothic horror to any historically-based campaign. Of course, if you are running a strictly historical campaign, there is no place for creatures of supernatural horror. If you are running a legendary or fantasy campaign (as described in the various HR books), you can easily add as many or as few of these horrific elements as you desire.

*In a Masque of the Red Death campaign:* H. G. Wells' time machine or another magical or scientific method could allow player characters (PCs) from a *Masque* campaign to travel back in time and through space to a Greek, Roman, Celtic, Viking, Carolingian, Crusader, or Elizabethan setting, there to do battle with the Red Death and potentially alter the course of history. Before introducing time travel to your *Masque* campaign, you should study the *Chronomancer* supplement for cautions and mechanics to deal with the possibility of heroes' actions changing history.

Alternatively, you can use the material presented in this article in the standard (1890s) Gothic Earth setting. This information can provide useful historical background for adventures or contemporary challenges. Perhaps a modern mystic or archeologist rediscovers the power of the *protom * spell and, unaware of its dangers, becomes a loup du noir werewolf (or werelion). Or the corrupted Sidhe of Celtic Ireland might play an important role in a modern adventure.

*In another AD&D campaign:* The material in this article can easily be adapted to a standard AD&D or RAVENLOFT® campaign. The magical lands of the Sidhe and mythic Viking islands could easily be converted into Ravenloft Islands of Terror. The rampaging Sidhe of Celtic nightmare are not too dissimilar to the Sidhe of the BIRTHRIGHT® campaign. Knight terrors (described in connection with the Crusades) might work well in a DRAGONLANCE® campaign. It's not too hard to imagine keres (from Greek legend) haunting the deserts of Athas in a DARK SUN® game. Even PLANESCAPE® expeditions to Ysgard or the Celtic domains on the Outlands could gain an edge of horror based on the material about the Vikings and Celts in this



## In Gothic Earth, the medusa Althea makes her horrid lair near the Aegean Sea.

article. The doppelganger Praetorian Guards from ancient Rome could just as easily spice up a politically-oriented campaign in the FORGOTTEN REALMS® GREYHAWK® setting, and the mysterious qabal known as the Phoenix would work well in some of the Realms' more civilized lands.

### Starting Assumptions

*Masque of the Red Death* is a RAVENLOFT campaign expansion, and a historically-founded campaign involving the Red Death must share some of the mechanics of the RAVENLOFT setting. Characters in historical settings should be required to make fear, horror, and madness checks, unless their players adequately roleplay these reactions. Characters who perform evil actions or cast spells are required to make powers checks to determine whether they come to the notice of the Red Death. The corruption of magic with evil power makes any kind of detection of evil impossible. The power of necromantic magic has gradually increased since the arrival of Red Death, and by

500 A.D. it is enhanced as described in the *Masque* rules. It is impossible to use any kind of magic to leave Gothic Earth, though it is possible to enter various demiplanes and alternate dimensions that are strongly connected to Gothic Earth—notably the realms of the Sidhe and the Viking Other Worlds. It is also possible, at least theoretically, to travel through time to different eras of Gothic Earth's past or future.

Several of the Historical Reference sourcebooks describe two or three options for historically-based campaigns: *Age of Heroes* (historical, fantasy), *Charlemagne's Paladins* (historical, legendary, fantasy), *The Crusades* (historical, legendary, fantasy), *A Mighty Fortress* (historical, fanciful, fantastic). *Celts*, *The Glory of Rome*, and *Vikings* assume the campaign to be moderately magical, at about the level the other books describe as "legendary." The legendary type of campaign (called "fanciful" in *A Mighty Fortress*) works best for a *Masque* campaign, since magic is restricted with longer casting times and limited spell



## New Priest Spell: Protomê

(Alteration)

Level: 3

Sphere: Animal

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Duration: 1 turn per level

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: The caster

Saving Throw: None

This dangerous spell allows a priest to tap the raw natural power of an animal by donning its *protomê*—its head and mane. When the spell works properly, the priest's Strength score becomes 18/00, his hit points are increased by 20, and he is immune to fear, whether natural or magical. These bonuses apply regardless of the kind of skin donned by the priest.

There are several complications involved in the spell, however. First is the possibility that the priest might undergo an actual physical transformation when he casts the spell. This chance is 10% per daily use of the spell (i.e., 10% the first time the spell is cast in a day, 20% the second time, and so on). When this transformation occurs, the priest actually becomes a large and aggressive specimen of the animal type represented by the *protomê*. The priest has no control over his actions during

the transformation and is in a state of bloodlust similar to that found in lycanthropes. The spell still expires at the end of its duration.

The second complication is that the spell lingers in the priest's memory after it is cast. Each time the spell is cast, there is a 5% chance (non-cumulative) that it remains in the priest's memory, while another spell of the same level, chosen randomly, is erased from memory—without the priest's conscious knowledge. After that point, if the priest attempts to cast the spell that was wiped from his memory, he inadvertently casts *protomê* instead. Similarly, once a priest has learned and cast *protomê*, he must make a successful saving throw vs. spells at the beginning of every day if he does not wish to memorize *protomê*. The power that comes from donning the animal skin is dangerously addictive.

If a priest using *protomê* should change to beast form 10 times, then he becomes an actual lycanthrope, similar to the loup du noir (described in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Annual*, Volume One). His alignment changes to chaotic evil.

The material component of the spell is the head and pelt of any carnivorous animal, such as a lion, a bear, or a wolf.

been physically transformed by their long association with this ultimate evil power.

The medusa Althea, described in the *RAVENLOFT MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® II*, would be a perfect addition to an adventure set during the Age of Heroes. Her entry in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM* transforms the medusa from a standard AD&D monster, quarry to be hunted, into a creature of true horror perfect for Gothic Earth. Althea could be cast as at least a demilord in the "Ranks of Terror" outlined in Appendix II of *A Guide to Gothic Earth*, if not a lord in her own right. Accordingly, her lair on the Ravenloft isle of Demise can be transformed into a suitable lair in the Aegean Sea or elsewhere, again following the guidelines and examples in Appendix II of *A Guide to Gothic Earth*. Other monsters from Greek legend can be adapted in the same way: the minotaur, the hydra, the cyclops, and even the Bacchae described in the *Planes of Chaos Monstrous Supplement*.

The two greatest horrors of the Age of Heroes, however, are remnants of Greece's ancient religious history. First are the keres, spirits of departed ancestors or heroes who were once worshipped at country shrines throughout Greece. In times of trouble, townsfolk would gather at their shrines to ask advice of the spirits there. Sometimes the advice was simple enough: the town must re-establish standards of morality and justice, take care of the weak and the old, and so on. Often, however, the spirits demanded human sacrifice, and the townsfolk were terrified into complying. These shrines still exist in the Grecian countryside during the time of an Age of Heroes campaign, and can be a source of endless horror. The keres are described in the *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Annual*, Volume 2 (under Ghost). Consult *Van Richten's Guide to the Ancient Dead* for inspiration about the cults that serve these often hostile spirits.

The second horrific element derives from the ancient religious tradition of wearing an animal skin in order to claim some of the animal's magical power. Heracles wore a lion's head and mane to claim its great strength and ferocity. Priests in Minos wore bull masks; the goddess Hera was sometimes depicted

selection, as it is in the *Masque* rules. The fantasy campaign described in *Age of Heroes* is similar to the legendary campaign in this respect.

## The Twilight

(Age of Heroes)

During the ancient Greek civilization of Gothic Earth, the Red Death was relatively new to the world. As described in *A Guide to Gothic Earth*, the corruption of magic throughout the Mediterranean world was accomplished quickly, and the Red Death learned of human nature by provoking wars (often through minions such as great feyrs). Mummies were created in Egypt, the first of the undead, and the earliest qabals began to form.

The Greeks recognized magic as an evil force, believing that their goddess Hecate demanded sacrifices from wiz-

ards before she would grant them their spells (see *Age of Heroes*, page 33, and *Legends & Lore*, page 117). The sorceress Circe (AL CE; AC 10; MV 12; Transmuter 15; hp 40; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1—4 [dagger]; SA spells, *Circe's wand of polymorphing*; SD spells; S 10, D 17, C 14, I 17, W 17, Ch 18) is among the most famous of Hecate's worshippers. She is known for transforming Odysseus' entire crew into swine, using the magical wand described on page 74 of *Age of Heroes*. (The wand transforms men into pigs, lions, sheep, or wolves, corresponding to their basic nature.) She is believed to be immortal and so could make an appearance in a campaign set at any point during the 2,000-year history covered in *Age of Heroes*. In addition to evil sorcerers who serve the Red Death, ancient Greek heroes might encounter hags who have



with a cow's head. This tradition survives in the form of a priest spell, *protomê* (see sidebar).

## The Burning Empires

(*The Glory of Rome*)

The age of the Roman republic and empire produced both heights of human achievement in the struggle against the Red Death and depths of depravity brought on by its hideous power. The massive military and political strength of the empire brought peace and stability to some regions for centuries, and the power of the emperor was sometimes used for great good. One need only mention the names of Nero and Caligula to remember that the emperor was also capable of great evil.

In a campaign set during the period of the Empire (as opposed to the Republic), characters might find themselves entangled in the web of intrigue spun by the Emperor's personal bodyguards and secret police, the Praetorian Guard. Fully as fearsome as Azalin's Kargat, the Praetorian Guard was organized by Augustus to keep peace in Rome and Italy, as well as to serve as the bodyguard of the emperor. Throughout the Imperial period, however, the Praetorian Guard does the Emperor's dirty work, carrying out assassinations and executions, eliminating rivals and traitors and other potential threats to the throne. The Praetorians are not only soldiers but also spies, and it is rare indeed for any whippers of mutiny or rebellion to escape their ears, and thus the ears of the Emperor.

What no human citizen of Rome realizes, however, is that the upper ranks of the Praetorian Guard are made up exclusively of doppelgangers. These minions of the Red Death use their insidious powers to control the vast Roman Empire. No emperor can survive long who does not curry favor with the Praetorian doppelgangers, and it is even possible that at times a doppelganger has sat on the emperor's throne, at least for a while.

In 41 A.D., three high-ranking members of this doppelganger clan assassinated the emperor Gaius (Caligula), and the Guard then installed his uncle Claudius on the throne. One of the masterminds of this plot, the veteran soldier

Cassius Chaerea, is in fact one of Gothic Rome's greatest lords, a doppelganger prince named Bekin (Ravenloft Doppelganger: AL LE; AC 5; MV 12; HD 5; hp 40; THAC0 15; #AT 1; Dmg 1–12 [fist] or 1d6+3 [gladius or pilum]; SA surprise; SD save as 10th level fighter, immune to *sleep* and *charm*; S 18/45, D 14, C 16, I 15, W 12, Ch 11).

The Defiance, Gothic Earth's first and greatest qabal, had its origins in Roman Alexandria near the beginning of the fourth century Alexandria's library and the nearby Serapeum (a temple dedicated to the Greco-Egyptian god Sarapis) served as a headquarters for this group, and the budding philosophy known as Neoplatonism served to advance many of their theories and ideals.

Neoplatonism, founded by Plotinus of Alexandria in the early third century, represents the heritage of the great Greek philosopher Plato, as his teaching was interpreted in this age hungry for religious experience and liberation. Neoplatonism is less an academic philosophy than a mystery religion. Under the aegis of the great Neoplatonic school of Alexandria, Platonic teachers (and leaders of the Defiance) teach much as Plato himself did, and Socrates before him—holding discussions in public squares, while privately initiating disciples into higher mysteries. The qabalists of the Defiance should be considered philosopher-mages, as described in *The Glory of Rome*. The leader of the Defiance at the height of its power, in the early fifth century, was a woman named Hypatia, a 12th-level philosopher-mage (AL LG; AC 10; MV 12; Mage 12; hp 33; THAC0 17; #AT 1; Dmg 1–4 [dagger]; S 12, D 10, C 13, I 17, W 15, Ch 17). Hypatia is well-known throughout Alexandria and beyond for her learning, her eloquent speeches, and her physical beauty. She is a renowned Neoplatonist philosopher but also well-equipped for the battle against the Red Death.

As described in *A Guide to Gothic Earth*, the Defiance was shattered by an Alexandrian mob, under the leadership of the theologian Cyril, in 415 A.D.—just a few short weeks before they would have driven the Red Death from the world with a powerful spell. Exciting adventures could revolve around this event or its aftermath, as PCs struggle to

find even snippets of the spell the Defiance planned to cast against the Red Death.

A campaign set during the Roman empire could span the Mediterranean world. PCs could face mummies and necromancers in Egypt, human-sacrificing druids in Gaul and Britain, Carthaginian ghosts or Greek keres. Even rakshasas from India might appear on the Roman scene by way of Alexandria's spice trade, and Chinese horrors are brought closer by the great silk route. The Roman world is larger than any prior nation had ever known, and Roman heroes must be alert for all varieties of the Red Death's minions.

## The Corruption of the Sidhe

(*Celts*)

Like the Greeks, the Celts recognize the dangers inherent in the practice of magic, believing that giving oneself over to it entirely is bound to corrupt a person (see *Celts*, page 32). Evil sorcerers who have been thoroughly corrupted abound in Celtic legend. When a human is corrupted by the tainted power of magic, it is a pity, and a loss to the eternal struggle against evil. But a far greater loss to the world was the corruption of the Sidhe.

The Sidhe are the remnants of the Tuatha de Danaan, a proud and magical race that inhabited the lands of the Celts before the birth of humanity. Driven from the land by mortal conquests, the Tuatha retreated to their own realms: some to Tir Nan Og, the land of youth, where they became the Celtic gods, others to a mystical dimension of faerie. The lands of faerie co-exist with the mortal world, sharing connections at special places (ancient burial mounds, seashores) and special times (dusk and dawn, midsummer and midwinter). Time passes differently in these lands, such that a mortal who finds himself in the realm of the Sidhe for a night may return to his home the next morning to find that a century has passed.

The lands of the Sidhe are beautiful but dangerous. The Red Death's influence over all magic has warped the very fabric of the Sidhe's being, turning them into twisted shadows of their former glory. Their lands, lovely by day, are as dark and deadly as any Darklord's



**The Sidhe and their kin are dangerous and treacherous tempters or mortal kings.**

domain in Ravenloft when the sun goes down. The Sidhe of Gothic Earth are, with few exceptions, chaotic evil and savage in temperament. They are masters of magic, able to use standard AD&D wizard spells with normal casting times. The few Sidhe who have managed to keep themselves back from evil have done so only by forswearing the use of magic.

Humans who find themselves drawn into the lands of the Sidhe—usually by wandering lost in a forest late at night, or traveling too close to the ancient burial mounds or standing stones on the wrong night—find themselves in a land of nightmare. Whispered stories tell of entire war-bands chasing fleeing enemies into the mist, only to find themselves in the dark night of Annwn or some other Sidhe kingdom, where one by one the bravest of soldiers falls prey to Sidhe magic. The Sidhe are masters of shapechanging, illusion, and enchantment, and magical threats from *phantasmal killers* to powerful sleep spells to near-lycanthropic shapeshifters face mortals in faerie realms. Even the plant life in Sidhe lands is dangerous to mortals: evil and undead treants, quickwood

trees, death's head trees, and hangman trees prey on the unwary.

The Sidhe and their kin are dangerous to mortals even outside of their faerie realms. Celts describes the leanan sith, often seen as something of a vampire (see the entry for Ihiannan shee in the *FORGOTTEN REALMS MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Appendix II*), and the baobhan sith (not to be confused with the pixie-like creature of the same name described in the *Ravenloft MC Appendix III*), another vampiric relative of the Sidhe. Celts also mentions the Sidhe "Fool" who devotes his life to tormenting humanity. One notable example of this type of Sidhe is a warrior-princess named Fiona of the Whirling Sword. Fiona rules a small Sidhe domain that tends to intersect the mortal world in northern Ireland, along the coast. Her realm, known as the Isle of Mists, is as frightening a domain as any surrounded by the Mists of Ravenloft. Fiona herself is an 8th-level fighter, and carries a *sword of life stealing* which she whirls around her head in a frenzy (hence her nickname) when battling human enemies. She has special magical abilities granted to her by the Red Death: she can extend the mists of her island

into mortal realms to bring back human prey, and she can seal the borders of her domain like any Ravenloft Darklord. In addition, she can use *transport via plants* to travel between any trees in her domain, and she can alter the growth of plants on the island at will, causing paths to circle back on themselves forming intricate labyrinths to trap intruders. She can *pass without trace* and use *invisibility to animals* at will. Three times per day, she can use *entangle*, *warp wood*, *snake*, *spike growth*, or *wall of thorns*. Though she bears certain similarities to an elven vampire, she is not undead and has none of those creatures' weaknesses. (Sidhe female: AL CE; AC 2 [*studded leather* +1]; MV 12; Fighter 8; hp 67; THAC0 10; #AT 1; Dmg 1–8 +3 [*long sword of life stealing*]; S 17, D 18, C 16, I 13, W 9, Ch 16.)

These creatures, along with banshees and Celtic lycanthropes such as werebears, wereboars, werefoxes, and wererats, can provide a strong element of horror in a Celtic campaign.

The *Legends & Lore* volume describes a Celtic "magical item" of some importance to the Sidhe: standing stones. As Celts points out, modern archeology has determined that these ancient stone structures actually predate the expansion of the Celts by at least a thousand years. In fact, these circles are Sidhe places of power, and the magical effects of standing stones are corrupted by the Red Death just like the rest of the Sidhe's magic. As described in *Legends & Lore*, standing stones are constructed specifically to amplify the effects of spells from a certain school of magic (not priestly sphere) when those spells are cast within the standing stones. Most standing stones provide a multiplier of 20–50 ( $d4+1 \times 10$ ) to the range, duration, or area of effect of spells from their designated school. Only Sidhe wizards or humans with Sidhe blood can gain this benefit from the stones.

The benefit comes with strings attached, of course. The power of the Red Death is so strong in these circles that the chance of failing the Powers check made when casting the spell is doubled. Thus, a character casting a third-level spell in standing stones would make a Powers check of 6%, rather than the usual 3%. If the spell is



cast for evil purposes, the doubling is cumulative.

For all the evil influence of the Sidhe throughout the Celtic lands, the druids and seers of the Celts often provided a counterbalance to the Red Death's power. The "wizard" known as Merlin (more likely a druid or manteis than an actual wizard) is known to have headed a qabal known as The Stone, but this qabal existed for some time before the time of King Arthur (circa 520), and could play a part in a Celtic campaign set during most any historical period. The Stone—as well as the network of qabals known as the White Wizards—are a mighty force for good in the lands of the Celts, and they should be an constant if nearly invisible presence through all of the PCs' adventures against minions of the Red Death.

### The Mists of Niflheim

(Vikings)

The world of the Vikings, even after the relatively civilized Carolingian period, is a brutal and horrifying world indeed. Powerful servants of evil have made their homes in the frost-covered lands of Scandinavia and beyond for longer than human memory, perhaps cast out of Egypt while powerful good sorcerers still remained in that land. The Vikings are menaced by giants and trolls (see the description of Fensir in the *Planes of Conflict Monstrous Supplement*), which might sometimes become powerful enough to serve as dark lords and proper villains in Gothic Earth. The gates of Hel's domain too often fail to contain the dead, and the Vikings are haunted by such horrors (described in *Vikings*, pages 44–49) as gasts (spectres), gengångar (zombies), sendings (revenants), spoke (poltergeists), and svipa (ghosts). The spectre, Jezra Wagner, described in the *Ravenloft Monstrous Compendium, Volume II*, could be adapted to a Viking setting with little difficulty. Likewise, the Viking-like Kosti vampire, Audun Beck, described in *Children of the Night: Vampires*, could easily be adapted to a Viking campaign.

Similar to the drakkar of the sea vampire Audun Beck, ghost ships are a common phenomenon in Viking waters. Such strong emotions and violence surround Viking raiding ships that, when these ships are lost, their crews pass into



### The gates of Hel's domain too often fail to contain the restless dead.

undeath as sea zombies, lacedons, or even wights while their captains become ghosts or spectres. These ghost ships appear on the surface at night, during the full or new moon, or on the anniversary of their sinking, and their horrific crews bring terror to coastal towns and other boats.

Viking berserkers gain great power as warriors by abandoning themselves to the primal rage deep within the human psyche, expressed in an animal totem such as a wolf or bear. They use this power, however, only at great risk to their humanity. Higher-level berserkers who use their ability to assume animal form must make a Ravenloft Powers check, with a percentage chance of failure equal to their level. If they are actively pursuing evil ends by changing to animal form, the chance of failure is doubled. As they slide into the Red Death's web of evil, they are slowly transformed into true lycanthropes, the werewolves and werebears (hamhleypa) described in *Vikings*, pages 44–45. Note that hamhleypa are similar to the loup du noir werewolves described in the

*MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Annual*, Volume One, and to priests who succumb to the curse of the *protomé* spell (see earlier sidebar).

Runecasters using their potent magic must also make Powers checks with a chance of failure equal to their level. As with other spellcasters, using runes with necromantic effects or to evil purposes doubles the chance of failure. As runecasters inevitably sink down toward evil, they risk the same fate as their patron, Odin, who killed himself on Yggdrasil to gain the knowledge of runes (see *Vikings*, page 33, and the blunt summary in the *PLANESCAPE* supplement *On Hallowed Ground*, page 141: "he's dead"). Runecasters who succumb to the power of the Red Death are fated to become walking dead of one sort or another.

Like the Celts, the Vikings tell tales of strange lands that have no place on maps of the mortal world. Sometimes Viking boats are tossed by storms or swallowed in fog until they find themselves on the shores of alien lands like Grundir, the realm of Earl Egdi the sor-

cerer and his trollish retainers (see *Vikings*, page 95). These “imaginary” lands can be treated like Ravenloft’s island domains, trapping unwary travelers in realms of nightmare.

There is no qabal activity in the Viking lands, for good or ill. There are forces of good, however, loose-knit bands (it is hardly appropriate to call them organizations) of good-hearted folk who struggle against evil’s influence in their homelands. One such band is actually a group of swanmays, led by a warrior woman named Hildigunn (AL NG; AC 7; MV 3 or 15, FI 19 (D); Ranger 8; hp 53; THAC0 13; Dmg 1 1/2 or 1–8 + 2 (*long sword* +2); SD +1 or better weapon to hit in swan form; MR 16%; SZ M; ML Champion (15); XP 1,400; S 14, D 15, C 14, I 10, W 16, Ch 11). Hildigunn wields a *long sword* +2 named *Srifing*, made by the giantess Thorgerd Skulisbane for Hildigunn’s swanmay mentor, Dagmaer Sendingslayer. Dagmaer is best known for destroying a revenant sent by an evil Finnish wizard to destroy her. Less well-known is that, with his dying breath, this Finnish sorcerer cursed Dagmaer and the sword she carried. *Srifing* still bears this curse, which causes any allies of its wielder who fall in battle to return as *gengångers* (zombies) to haunt the wielder.

### The New Empire (*Charlemagne’s Paladins*)

The world of Charlemagne and his paladins is not all that far removed from that of the Celts. The Sidhe are still present in the time of Charlemagne, though much weakened, now seen as diminutive mischief-makers rather than the noble warriors of old. Celtic skinchangers and nature spirits still appear in Carolingian lands, and Merlin’s alliance of qabals remains a potent force for good.

For all that Carolingian Europe still holds many of the ancient Celtic horrors, the political landscape of the land has changed vastly since ancient Celtic times, and this will have a profound impact on adventures during this period of Gothic Earth’s history. Not only has Charlemagne united the splintered kingdoms of France and Germany with the blessing of the Pope, but the qabals that serve good are more organized and powerful than at any time since the Defiance.

The effect of this is that all adventures in Carolingian Gothic Earth take place against a backdrop of conflict between the powerful, organized forces of good and the legions of the Red Death’s minions. When an evil sorceress enchants one of Charlemagne’s knights and leads him away under her power, it is never just an isolated incident. Both the knight and the sorceress are parts of larger forces. The paladin—whether he knows it or not—is a servant of the good qabals, and the enchantress—fully aware of her position—is a treasured minion of evil. The battle between the good qabals and the Red Death is fought large in Carolingian Europe; the lines are clearly drawn.

The minions of the Red Death take many forms during this period. Perhaps the favorite minions of evil are human wizards and witches. Certainly these are the choice opponents in many of the legends of Charlemagne and his paladins (see *Charlemagne’s Paladins*, pages 58–59). Many of these are ordinary mortals with magical ability, but others, particularly the sorceresses, have faerie (Sidhe) blood. Some of the sorceresses in the legends could be considered hags (any of the three varieties).

One of the most loathsome servants of evil, however, is Ganelon of Mayence—one of Charlemagne’s Peers, who treacherously causes the death of Roland, Oliver, Archbishop Turpin, and 20,000 Frankish soldiers in Roncesvalles Pass. No mere mortal, Ganelon is in fact a baatezu servant of the Red Death, perhaps even a pit fiend, cloaked behind its innate *polymorph self* ability to appear fully human. Constantly scheming, the creature that passes as Ganelon often allows others to see through what they think are its plots and plans—which only serve to conceal its true purposes. It is possible, even likely, that this foul creature faked its own death in Roncesvalles after the slaughter of Roland and his men, the better to continue to pursue its twisted schemes.

Charlemagne considers the institution of monasticism to be a potentially great bearer of culture and learning, and actively encourages the adoption of the Rule of St. Benedict in Frankish monasteries. Often, monasteries live up to the king’s high expectations, and carry on not only the learning and culture of the

church, but also the ancient wisdom of the Defiance. Almost as often, however, monasteries fall from their high calling and become centers of evil. Sometimes the faith of the brothers is simply swallowed up in material concerns and politics. In the most extreme cases, however, entire orders of monks are transformed into heucuva, continuing a pale mockery of their regimented lives but now totally devoted to the Red Death.

### The Stone Cracks (*The Crusades*)

The period of the first Crusades (circa 1095–1192) marks the end of the shadow orders operating in unity under the aegis of the White Wizards. The good qabals have grown to distrust each other, thanks to centuries of manipulation by the Red Death and its minions. Many have slipped into the path of evil, relying too heavily on magical power and too little on purity of heart. With the qabals once again disorganized and fearful, evil can once again breed war and hatred in the world with impunity.

For a variety of reasons—religious, economic, political—the nations of Europe began a quest to free the Holy Land, particularly Jerusalem, from the hands of the Muslims, who had held it since the expansion of Islam in the seventh century. The First Crusade, preached by Pope Urban II beginning in 1095, set the stage for three centuries marked not only by warfare and violence, but by the worst sorts of intolerance, hatred, greed, injustice, and depravity—just the stuff on which the Red Death feeds. Even the highest ideals and loftiest beliefs are not immune to the Red Death’s corruption, and many well-meaning spiritual and temporal leaders found themselves pawns of a much greater evil power during the Crusades.

The year 1118 marked the founding of the Order of the Temple, better known as the Templars (see *The Crusades*, pages 34–36). In later years, the Templars would be accused of heresy and occult practices, and these accusations would be used as justification for robbing the Templars of their great wealth and property. In the time of the Crusades, no one accused the Templars of being anything but devout (perhaps fanatical) Christian

*Continued on page 34*



CLIMATE/TERRAIN:	Any
FREQUENCY:	Very rare
ORGANIZATION:	Hierarchy
ACTIVITY CYCLE:	Any
DIET:	Mental energy
INTELLIGENCE:	Exceptional (15–16)
TREASURE:	W (Y)
ALIGNMENT:	Lawful evil

NO. APPEARING:	1–3
ARMOR CLASS:	5 (10)
MOVEMENT:	9 (12)
HIT DICE:	By level (see below)
THAC0:	By hit dice (see below)
NO. OF ATTACKS:	
DAMAGE/ATTACK:	By weapon (see below)
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	See below
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	See below
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M
MORALE:	See below
XI' VALUE:	Variable



Knight terrors are once-human creatures that drain mental energy. Formed from knights whose fanaticism led them from the path of good, they live among their former companions, feeding on their wills and emotions. They appear as they did before their transformations, at least when they are well-fed.

**Combat:** Knight terrors have all the class abilities they possessed as humans, usually powerful warriors or priests. In addition, they gain the following abilities: *cause fear* 3/day, *charm person* 3/day, *suggestion* 2/day, *phantasmal killer* 1/day, and *emotion* 1/day. They can also use a special mental attack once per round, instead of a physical or magical attack. The knight terror unleashes a bolt of mental energy with a range of 10 feet, rolling against his normal THAC0. The target's Armor Class for purposes of this attack equals his Wisdom score subtracted from 20. If the attack is successful, the knight terror drains one point of Wisdom from the victim. Lost Wisdom returns at the rate of one point per day.

The drained Wisdom feeds a knight terror, improving its physical and psychic strength. A knight terror's Wisdom score is ordinarily 10–12. Drained Wisdom boosts this score, but every 12 hours the knight terror loses one point of Wisdom, causing the creature to grow "hungry" for more. A knight terror's current Wisdom score affects its power in many ways, as shown on the table below. The knight terror's appearance also varies. When sated, it looks like a strong, healthy warrior; but when starving it is withered and pale. When hungry, the knight terror becomes increasingly fearful and paranoid, jumping at shadows and suspicious of everyone. When full, however, the knight terror is a model of courage, lending its morale to its followers as it leads them bravely into battle.

**Habitat/Society:** Knight terrors remain a part of the hierarchy to which they belonged before their transformation. They are generally leaders in their orders, as they are driven by ambition, and they gradually corrupt their followers while deriving strength from their mental fortitude. In this way, entire branches of knightly orders have been distracted from their original purposes and led down paths of evil.

Knight terrors continue to function as part of human society according to their normal roles. They do not reproduce.

**Ecology:** Knight terrors have been removed from the ecological system, much like undead. However, like vampires or ghouls, they must feed in order to maintain their existence. Sages theorize that their means of sustenance is a curse of divine justice. In their human lives, knight terrors were so lacking in willpower that they succumbed to of evil. In their transformed state, they must sap the wills of others to survive. They have no hesitation about feeding from allies if enemies are not available. If a knight terror's Wisdom score ever falls below 3 for lack of feeding, the creature is destroyed.

## Knight-Terror Attack Results

Wisdom	Strength	Hunger	HP/Die	Morale
3–6	5	Starving	1	Unsteady (7)
7–9	7	Hungry	3	Average (10)
10–12	17	Normal	4	Steady (12)
13–15	18	Fed	6	Elite (14)
16–18	18/00	Sated	8	Fanatic (18)

warriors sworn to drive the Muslims from the Holy Land.

For the most part, this perception is correct. Most Templars are simply pious knights devoted to their Holy War. But certain leaders of the Order of the Temple, in their search for mystical and spiritual power to drive the heathens from their sacred land, have stumbled on the power bestowed by the Red Death. In return for their fanatical devotion to slaughter and violence, these high-level warrior priests and monastic warriors (see *The Crusades*, pages 23–24 and 27–28) are transformed into vile minions of evil called knight terrors.

Parallel, in some ways, to the Templars on the Christian side is the Muslim organization of “holy slayers” known as Assassins. Dedicated not to the extermination of Christians but to the establishment of Shi’ite Islam and the elimination of Saladin’s Sunni caliphate (see *The Crusades*, pages 14–15). As holy as they believe their ends to be, men who devote their lives to the act of murder cannot escape the grip of the Red Death for long, and members of the Assassins have been transformed into a variety of monsters to serve their foul master. Kenku, invisible stalkers, and even slayer genies are all found within the ranks of the Assassins, and all have given up their humanity for the sake of power. (Consult the AL-QADIM® sourcebox Assassin Mountain for inspiration about the assassins and adventure plots involving them.)

Perhaps the most fearsome creatures of Arabian lands during the Crusades are the yak-men (described in the *Land of Fate* boxed set and *MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM Annual*, Volume Two). Using their unique *magic jar* power, these creatures can move freely about in human society in pursuit of the forbidden knowledge they hope to use to enslave the entire human race. While the Templars are devoted to the extermination or conversion of Muslims, and the Assassins seek the elimination of the Sunni caliphate, the yak-men are dedicated to the subjugation or extermination of all humanity and do not discriminate between Franks and Turks, Shi’ites and Sunni in their quest for domination.

Wolfgang Baur wrote an excellent article in issue #198 of *DRAGON® Magazine*, entitled “Scimitars Against the Dark.”

This article offers inspiration for creating Arabian adventures with a horror flavor and includes suggested monsters and new character kits, all of which might be appropriate for a campaign set in or around Outremer during the Crusades.

It is worth mentioning that the qabal called Die Wächtern (“The Watchers”) was founded near Leipzig (at the time a small village in Saxony) around 1100. A group of knights on the First Crusade stumbled upon a cache of arcane knowledge brought from the Alexandrian library to the Holy Land by members of the Defiance. After fighting the servants of the Red Death in order to escape with their lives, these knights returned to their homes in Saxony and swore their loyalty to a new and holier war than the Crusades, a campaign against the evil menace this forbidden lore revealed. (See *The Gothic Earth Gazetteer*, page 57, for more information.)

Die Wächtern maintain a presence in Outremer throughout the Crusades. The local leader of the qabal is a priest of the Order of St. John named Michael von Magdeburg (AL LG; AC 10; MV 12; Cleric 4; hp 17; THAC0 18; #AT 0; Dmg 0; S 9, D 11, C 13, I 17, W 14, Ch 12). A staunch pacifist, Michael seeks to battle the influence of the Red Death indirectly, by struggling to stop the violence between Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land. He is, however, a veritable encyclopedia of forbidden lore, similar to his spiritual descendent Abraham van Helsing. He has possession of a holy relic, said to be the bowl of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar who received his sight at Jesus’ hand. This plain wooden bowl has the power to bestow *true seeing* once per week, which allows Michael to perceive minions of evil in their true forms.

Besides Die Wächtern, members of an evil qabal called The European Society are active in Outremer during the Crusades. This qabal is an ancestor of The White Legion (described in *The Gothic Earth Gazetteer*, page 63), and seeks primarily to prevent any intermingling of Frankish and Muslim cultures.

### The Phoenix

(*A Mighty Fortress*)

While *The Age of Heroes* covers a historical span of roughly two thousand years, *A Mighty Fortress* deals with a single cen-

tury, from 1550 to 1650. Over the course of history, the battle against the Red Death becomes increasingly intense, and greater events occur in a shorter span of years. In the Elizabethan era, the battle is no longer one of great forces sweeping the world, but a conflict between heroic individuals and specific minions of evil. In the grand scheme of history, the sixteenth century is not that far removed from the nineteenth, and an Elizabethan campaign with horror elements is not all that different from a normal campaign in Gothic Earth.

Adventurers in the time of the Wars of Religion could potentially encounter any of the monsters listed in *The Gothic Earth Gazetteer*. Human sorcerers (practitioners of black magic) and witches are worthy foes as well (see *A Mighty Fortress*, pages 90–92). The zombie lord, Coetlicrota the Undying, described in *A Guide to Gothic Earth* (pages 109–10), was created around 1533 in Lima, and could be encountered by adventurers whose travels take them to Spanish Peru. In addition, *A Mighty Fortress* discusses faeries and elves (the same malevolent Sidhe that have haunted Europe since the time of the Celts), ghosts and other restless spirits, the ghouls who inevitably follow in the wake of the horrible disease and warfare that mark this period, and the proto-vampires known as strigloi (pages 88–89).

While the strigloi are not the full-fledged vampires of later times, the first true vampire was created by the Red Death in Walachia just before the start of this historical period. Vlad Tepes, known as Dracula, met his mortal end in 1476, but was immediately raised to the right hand of evil as the first and greatest of the nosferatu. It is possible that adventurers in Eastern Europe might encounter this vampire, though he will be much weaker at this young age. Consult *Van Richten’s Guide to Vampires* for help in determining Dracula’s powers. The Dracula of the 1890s described in *A Guide to Gothic Earth* (pages 115–116) and *A Guide to Transylvania* (pages 86–87) has abilities roughly corresponding to an Ancient or Eminent vampire in Van Richten’s scheme. Three hundred years earlier, his abilities should lie roughly in the Mature to Old range. The following basic statistics are suggested: AC -1; HD



10+2; hp 71; THAC0 11. Weapons of +2 enchantment can strike him, and enemies save against his charm ability with only a -2 penalty, not -4. Of course, while PC adventurers might think they have won a major victory against this young Dracula, they will find that he has an uncanny ability to escape total destruction, resurfacing months or even years after an apparently total defeat.

Dracula's conflict with the qabal known as Die Wächtern began early in his unlife. The alert Watchers were quick to notice a new power on the scene, and though even the vampire's early plots were subtle beyond imagining, the qabalists soon discovered the villain behind them. They dangerously underestimated the power of their opponent, however, and found themselves out-matched by not only the fell power of the first vampire but also his tremendous intellect and cunning. In a massive counterattack in the early 1600s, Dracula struck at the very headquarters of Die Wächtern near Leipzig, destroying their ancient records and decimating the qabal membership. Only a few members survived to regroup and reestablish the qabal in Amsterdam. (See *The Gothic Earth Gazetteer*, page 57.) For more information about Eastern Europe in this period, see *A Guide to Transylvania*, page 17 ("After Dracula").

Besides Die Wächtern, several other qabals are active in Europe and elsewhere during the Elizabethan period. The Guild of the Dark Flower, an evil qabal of poisoners, was founded in Sibiu, in Transylvania, in the sixteenth century. This qabal is described in *A Guide to Transylvania* (page 94). Formed in Africa in the late sixteenth century, an alliance of Europeans and Africans formed to fight the slave trade and European colonialism. This qabal, known as Libertad (Liberty) made its first appearance on the west coast of Africa in 1589, and later becomes a part of the Nation of Nine (see *The Gothic Earth Gazetteer*, page 60).

The most important qabal of Elizabethan Europe, however, is unquestionably The Phoenix.



### The Phoenix: A Chaotic Good Qabal

Similar to La Lumière, the members of The Phoenix are dedicated to the belief that learning, science, and individual freedom are the tools and virtues necessary to free humanity from the power of the Red Death forever. Arising as part of the Italian Renaissance, The Phoenix shares the Renaissance ideals of humanism and claims as members some of the greatest thinkers of the Western world. By 1550 the group is the most widespread and influential qabal in the world, claiming members such as Galileo (see below).

The influence of The Phoenix, though greatly diminished, continues on into the 1890s, so this qabal can be used in a regular *Masque of the Red Death* campaign as well as one set in Elizabethan times.

**Symbol:** The Phoenix uses as its symbol the mythical bird after which it is named. The members of The Phoenix wear small medallions with a stylized representation of the bird rising up out of the flames of its funeral pyre.

**Membership:** From its beginnings, The Phoenix has sought out individuals of great intellect, pioneering spirit, and flawless character for its members. The ranks of The Phoenix contain more inventive, creative people than perhaps any other organization in history. These are men and women who do not fear to break with convention, when convention can be proven wrong by rational inquiry. They are free-thinking, independent-minded, and often willful souls.

**History:** The Phoenix was born in Italy in the early 1400s, supposedly without any influence or assistance from any

existing qabal. Hand in hand with the spread of the Renaissance through Europe, The Phoenix worked to free humanity from the shackles of superstition and fear that had kept it under the sway of the Red Death for centuries. Some stories tell that The Phoenix was founded by a renegade minion of the Red Death, perhaps a lycanthrope or even an undead being rebelling against its very nature. Other legends claim that such great minds as Leonardo da Vinci and Erasmus were important members of the qabal.

### A Brief Who's Who of Elizabethan Europe

In the same manner as the "Who's Who on Gothic Earth" section of *The Gothic Earth Gazetteer*, these paragraphs describe only a few of the more famous thinkers and mystics of the Elizabethan age, focusing on the "Forbidden Lore," the dark side of the events and personalities of the age.

**Christina, Queen of Sweden** (1626–1689): The daughter of Gustavus Adolphus, Christina ascended the throne of Sweden upon her father's death in 1632, when she was six years old. Count Axel Gustafsson Oxenstierna, a major figure in Gustavus' administration, ruled as regent until 1644. Christina was ill-suited to the role of queen, preferring the exercise of her mind to the exercise of power. She patronized many scholars and artists, including Rene Descartes. Christina refused to marry and abdicated the throne in 1654, leaving Sweden in the clothes of a man in order to seek adventure.

*Forbidden Lore:* While still Queen of Sweden, Christina is a member and official patron of The Phoenix. She is a scholarly mage herself (see *A Mighty Fortress*, pages 4647) who so far has managed to keep her soul free of the taint of evil inherent in the practice of magic.

**Galileo Galilei** (1564–1642): One of the most famous scientific minds of all time, Galileo was skilled in the sciences of mathematics, astronomy, and physics. He is credited with building the first complete telescope for viewing the stars, in 1608–1609. His observations of the movements of stars and planets led him to support Copernicus' hypothesis that the sun, not the earth, was in fact the center of the solar system—a belief that brought him to the attention of the Roman Inquisition. In 1616, the Inquisition barred him from further astronomical investigations; in 1633 he was forced to renounce the theories of Copernicus. He died in 1642, no less convinced of the truth he had learned through observation and scientific reasoning.

*Forbidden Lore:* Galileo is a prominent member of The Phoenix, outspoken in his support of rational scientific inquiry as a means of curing human ills and fighting the power of the Red Death.

**Michel de Notredame** (1503–1566): Born in Provence, in the south of France, Michel de Notredame (better known as Nostradamus) was a physician and astrologer, best known for his collection of obscure occult prophecies. As a newly-licensed doctor in 1522, he worked among plague victims in the countryside, and he returned to that work in Marseilles in 1544, after losing his wife and their two children to the plague. He remarried in 1547 and settled in Salon, where he lived the rest of his life. During this time he began the composition of his Prophecies, a collection of obscure verses written in a babble of languages (French, Provencal, Italian, Greek, and Latin). An incomplete collection of Prophecies was published in 1555. Quickly successful, the Prophecies earned Nostradamus an audience with Queen Catherine de' Medici in 1556. His popularity soon led to inquiries into his magical practices,

and Nostradamus, his health rapidly failing, went into semi-retirement until his death in 1566.

*Forbidden Lore:* Nostradamus is a scholarly wizard, a practitioner of gray magic (see *A Mighty Fortress*, pages 4647). He is a specialist diviner of 12th level, with an Intelligence score of 18. Contrary to the description of the scholarly mage in *A Mighty Fortress*, however, even gray magic is tainted by the power of the Red Death, and no adept can say that his "soul is free of dealings with evil" (page 46). Nostradamus, in fact, has already lost his soul to the Red Death in a bargain made after the death of his family. This bargain has given him authentic prophetic powers beyond the capability of any mere wizard spell, but Nostradamus has found this gift more of a curse than a blessing, and he teeters on the brink of madness.

**Arnold Jean du Plessis, duc de Richelieu** (1585–1642): The major force behind the French involvement in the Thirty Years War, Cardinal Richelieu virtually ruled France as dictator from 1630 to 1642. As bishop of Luçon, he was made secretary of state in 1616 and First Minister to Louis XIII in 1624. In this capacity, he was instrumental in suppressing the Huguenot uprising in La Rochelle (1627–1628; see *A Mighty Fortress*, page 76). He was equally ruthless in putting down the many conspiracies of the French nobility, including Louis' mother Marie de' Medici. His role in the Thirty Years War is spelled out in *A Mighty Fortress*, pages 78–80. In addition to his role as a statesman, Richelieu is known for his literary endeavors.

*Forbidden Lore:* Richelieu is far worse than a plotting, scheming man; he is, in fact, a plotting, scheming undead monster. Behind a human appearance woven of magic, Richelieu's true face is the sunken visage of a lich. Originally a sorcerer in rural Burgundy in the fourteenth century, Richelieu sought undeath in preference to the Black Death that had infected him. Richelieu's true undead form reveals the marks of the plague on his body, but he keeps himself cloaked in illusion, presenting a fair face to the world. Because of the festering wounds

on his undead body, Richelieu can cause disease with a touch, in addition to his necromantic abilities as a 16th-level lich wizard.

**William Shakespeare** (1564–1616): Elizabethan England's most renowned poet and dramatist, Shakespeare was born and died in Stratford-on-Avon, but he spent the years between 1588 and 1610 in London. He is credited with at least partial authorship of 38 plays but is equally famous for his sonnets and other poems.

*Forbidden Lore:* At first glance, there is little more to Shakespeare than meets the eye: a brilliant playwright, but otherwise unremarkable. It is whispered, however, that as a young man in Stratford, Shakespeare had an encounter that changed him forever. Stumbling into a ring of toadstools in the forest one night, Shakespeare witnessed the beautiful dance of the faerie folk. Before his eyes, however, the lovely sprites transformed into hideous monsters who sprang upon him, tearing at his flesh and clothes until he fainted.

He awoke the next morning whole in body, though his clothes were in tatters. He quickly learned, however, that his soul was rended by the faerie monsters. He is now a creature of twilight, torn between the realm of the living and the eternal regions. He is repulsed by holy ground and can be turned by clerics as if he were a shadow. He finds it impossible to pass through running water and prefers twilight and shadows to either bright light or total darkness. His heart is heavily burdened by this condition, but his writing seems to gain from it. Plays and poems alike well up from a deep spring inside him, rich with the pleasures and pains of life.



*This is James' fourth Masque of the Red Death article published in these pages (not counting his adventure, "Falls Run," in DUNGEON® Adventures #67). He wants to thank Bill Connors for creating such a great setting and for taking hate mail so well.*





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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

9 AM EDT, May 21, 1998

Last Unicorn Games announces new STAR TREK® roleplaying games, miniatures and live action games.

Los Angeles, CA - Last Unicorn Games has signed a multi-year license agreement with Viacom Consumer Products, the licensing division of Paramount Pictures, for the production of roleplaying games, supplements and accessories based on STAR TREK®: THE ORIGINAL SERIES™, STAR TREK®: THE NEXT GENERATION™, STAR TREK®: DEEP SPACE NINE™ AND STAR TREK®: VOYAGER™. This license will also allow Last Unicorn Games to produce miniature figure playing pieces and live action gaming material based on each of the properties, it was announced today by Bernard Cahill, business affairs and licensing, Last Unicorn Games.

We are expanding our presence in the mass market through our new distribution arrangement with Simon and Schuster and are very excited about the opportunity to bring STAR TREK® to game fans everywhere," said Christian Moore, creative director, Last Unicorn Games. "The richness and detail of the STAR TREK® universe truly places it in a class by itself. Its worlds, characters and stories are classics, and its tremendous fan appeal remains unequalled. It is our job to continue this great tradition, and our design team's initial development work is pushing the envelope for game play and graphic presentation. These games are gonna rock!

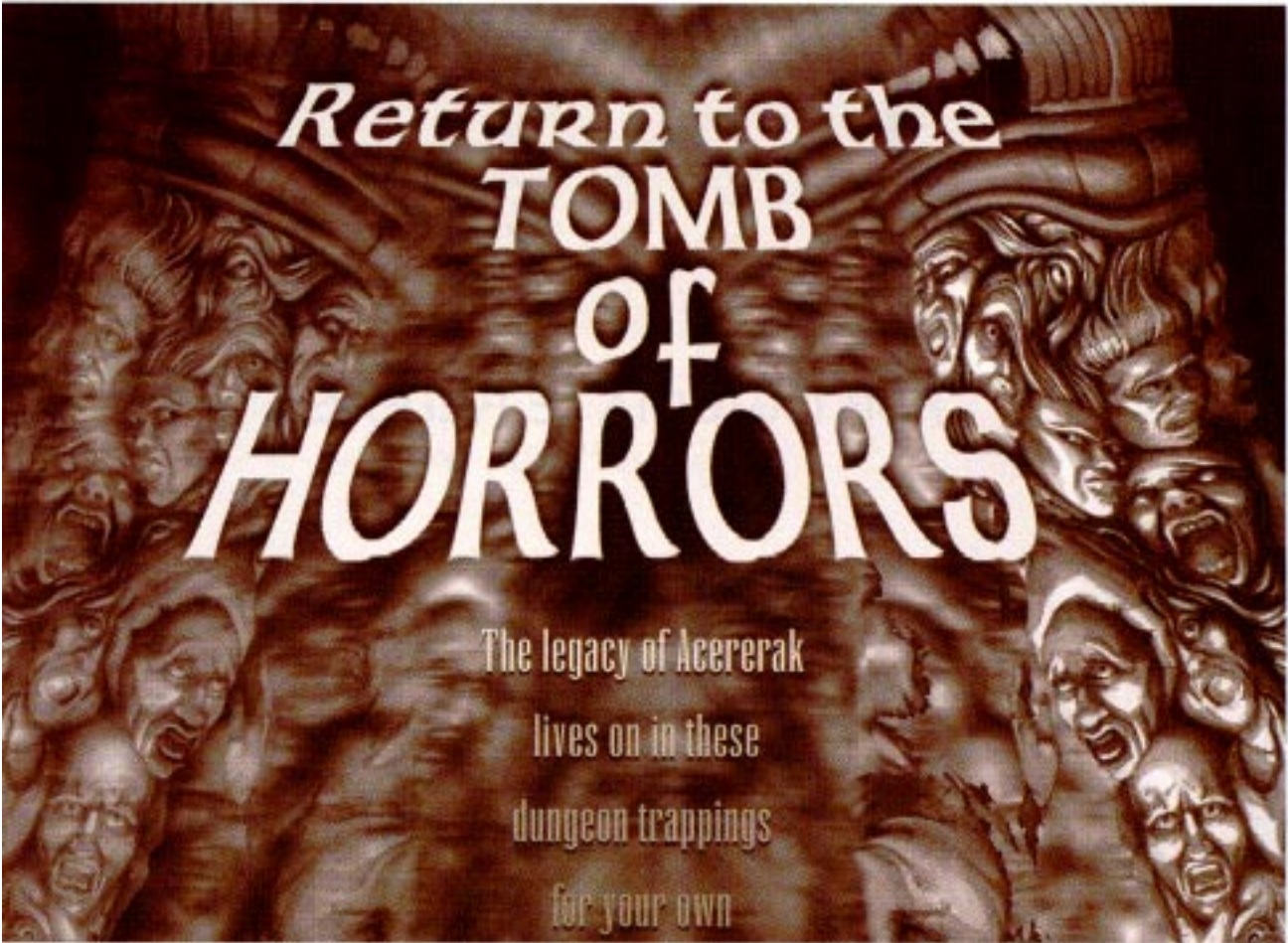
STAR TREK®, the greatest science fiction franchise of all time, has at long last returned to adventure gaming. Last Unicorn Games will release core game lines based on each of the four shows, with supplements and additional books building each line. The first release, a roleplaying game based on STAR TREK®: THE NEXT GENERATION™, will ship in the summer of 1998. Major releases for the other shows will follow at approximately six-month intervals.

In addition, Last Unicorn will be producing miniatures lines for each property, as well as rules for tabletop miniatures battles set in the Star Trek universe. Finally, a series of Live Action roleplaying books will allow fans to act out their character's adventures in sanctioned live action games and events throughout the world.

Last Unicorn Games, a Pennsylvania corporation with offices in Los Angeles, California, publishes the award winning roleplaying series - ARIA: Canticle of the Monomyth™ and collectible card games such as the critically acclaimed HERESY: KINGDOM COME™ and the best-selling DUNE™: EYE of the STORM™. Aria: Canticle of the Monomyth™ and Heresy: Kingdom Come™ are trademarks of Last Unicorn Games, Inc. DUNE™ is a trademark of the Herbert Limited Partnership. Last Unicorn Games and Last Unicorn Publishing are subsidiaries of Last Unicorn Games Inc.

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# Return to the TOMB of HORRORS

The legacy of Acererak  
lives on in these  
dungeon trappings  
for your own

**H**IDDEN TEMPLES, TOMBS, and catacombs share many attributes, including extreme age, questionable goals, and—most important of all—seclusion. Unfortunately, excavation and construction of such structures require hosts of workers, so all such projects share the same final problem: What is an evil overlord to do with the excavators, foremen, priests, architects, and other associated workers after the project is completed? As the old adage goes, “loose lips sink ships.” More often than not, your average evil entrepreneur finds a permanent, if ugly, solution to the problem of retiring construction workers, as demonstrated by Acererak the Devourer, lord of the Tomb of Horrors.

While alive, Acererak built an unholy temple in the name of a now deceased power. When the project neared completion, he slew every worker, excavator, and consecrating priest who had assisted in the temple’s construction. The murderer instructed his few remaining servants to place the dead and their effects into the lower cata-

return to the  
dealiest dungeon crawl  
in AD&D® history.

by Bruce R. Cordell

illustrated by  
Bob Klasnich

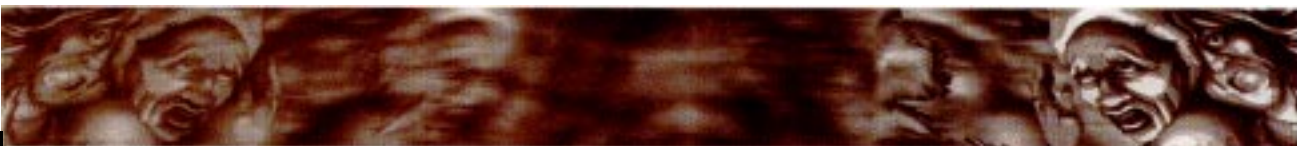
comb level of the temple, which was sealed off and paved over, consigning the mass grave to memory. Eventually, Acererak succumbed to the lure of lichdom, refusing to allow age and infirmity to end his existence. (The result was the dungeon crawl detailed in the classic AD&D game module, *Tomb of Horrors*, by co-creator of the AD&D game, Gary Gygax.)

Even in light of recent developments surrounding the Tomb of Horrors, no hero, grave robber, or questing necromancer has penetrated the forgotten crypt and returned alive to tell the tale; however, a map fragment purporting to depict the Undertomb has recently made its way by circuitous routes into the hands of the Ahrens the Sage in the city of Kalstrand. This scrap of parchment and its warning are the only evidence ever discovered concerning what might lie below the Tomb of Horrors! Note that the information that follows complements the original *Tomb of Horrors* independently of the TOMES™ revisitation, *Return to the Tomb of Horrors*, available now.

## Notes for the DM

“Below the Tomb of Horrors” contains material that can be incorporated into any existing tomb, catacomb, or crypt by the enterprising DM looking to add more “meat” in a specific scenario designed for high-level characters. For example, the catacomb level described in this article could conceivably be dis-





covered below grassy downs of mysterious origin, under the dungeons of an ancient castle, or beneath the city streets of a community built upon long-buried ruins. Alternatively, the random features table, traps, NPCs, and new magical items described below can be incorporated piecemeal into any scenario. The choice is entirely up to the DM; however, as designed here, the contents of the Undertomb lie beneath S1: *Tomb of Horrors*, having been completely sealed off from the upper complex and forgotten long before the temple ever became the death maze of Acererak's design.

The map fragment and warning referred to in this article were roughly scrawled by the now-deceased adventurer who was (un)lucky enough to find the Undertomb by chance. The fragment is entitled "Below the Tomb of Horrors," and it shows only the northwest corner of a square chamber labeled, "The Chapel of Evil" (referring to room 14 of the original *Tomb of Horrors*). An arrow points to the northwest corner of the chamber, and these words appear beside: "The Undertomb abides in darkness, without purpose . . ." The boundaries and chamber shown on the map might not be exact and are likely to be at least partially inaccurate; the unsteady hand of the mapper shows his mental deterioration at the time of the map's creation.

An expedition into the Undertomb by player characters does not draw the unwanted eye of Acererak; the sealed catacomb-realm has absolutely no relevance to the rest of his Tomb or his true designs. Of course, the PCs must travel into the Tomb of Horrors at some length to find the entrance to the Undertomb (see the description of the Undertomb Entrance, below).

No keyed DM map appears with this article; the DM who wishes to use any or all of the material presented below can arrange it as he or she sees fit, as specific source material or as generic ideas suitable for any setting.

## Undertomb Traps

The traps found in the Undertomb are creations of the undead architect Moghadam (see "Residents of the Undertomb") who still roams these dismal depths filled with never-ending anguish over Acererak's betrayal. The architect believes that he was murdered because his designs did not please his evil lord, so in undeath he labors yet (in vain) to create traps and spells within the Undertomb that might impress even the Devourer.

### Undertomb Entrance

An entrance lies beneath a 3' × 3' × 3' slab of rock in the northwest most portion of room 14, The Chapel of Evil (for those who choose to use the Undertomb in connection with S1: *Tomb of Horrors*). The stone plug is undetectable by a successful check for secret doors because it is completely flush with the surrounding flooring; it is part of the floor. Only an excavation of the stone (necessitating such tools as rock picks and similar implements) or utilitarian spells like *passwall* or *teleport* provide entry to an unlighted, narrow (two feet wide) stone stair that drops steeply into the darkness.

When initially unsealed, a burst of stale, putrid air rushes out with a breathy howl, requiring Constitution checks to all within 20 feet of the unsealed vault. Those who fail this check become nauseous (-3 to penalty to all actions and saves) for 1 turn. Any entrance to the Undertomb by player characters that does not involve unsealing the staircase (such as with a *teleport* or dimension door spell) consequently does not release the poisonous air sealed within. This proves fatal over a period of one turn. (After one turn spent breathing the confined air in the Undertomb, successful saves vs. poison are required each following round until clear air is reached or the breather succumbs.)

Those who physically unseal the entrance face other problems: a host of true tanar 'ri whose duties are to guard against ethereal intrusion, and to reset

the traps and rebuild the Tomb in the event of structural change or damage constantly patrol the area in ethereal form. Players who descend into the Undertomb stand a very real chance of being sealed in within 1d20 hours by patrolling tanar 'ri!

### Cul de Sac

A catacomb tunnel slowly narrows to approximately one foot wide, making it impossible for normal sized adventurers to continue in their chosen direction. A light directed into the crevice reveals that the passage widens again 30 feet away.

In truth, the passage does open into a 20' × 20' chamber of rough stone that is completely empty. The floor is quite muddy and unfortunately is partially formed by the Antispell Waters (see below). While the effects in this chamber are not exactly as those described under the trap heading of the same name, the antimagical mud has suffused the walls and even the very air of the room such that all magical spell, potion, item, and scroll effects are instantly nullified, and new magical effects from any of these sources are impossible to initiate. The antimagical effect of the mud also hinders the magical powers of enchanted creatures.

The practical effect of this is immediately obvious: *passwall* spells fail to function 15 feet short of the chamber, but more importantly, those who *teleported* or used *dimension door* to enter the chamber are unable to leave. Likewise, those who reduced themselves to squeeze through the slit entrance immediately revert to their proper size once within the chamber and are likewise trapped. Unless those within the chamber can tunnel through 30 feet of solid rock, they are irrevocably trapped.

### Dead Zone

This trap is actually centered upon one of the many cylindrical columns that appear to support the low ceiling of the Undertomb. Like the other columns, this one depicts stony faces screaming



in terror, fangs, and claws; however, this column does indeed have the power to dismay and terrify; the column acts as a negative capacitor and holds a small store of Negative Energy.

Anyone approaching within 10 feet of this column enters into a dead zone where a strange, empty feeling is apparent, as well as a definite chill in the air that is immediately traceable to the column. A closer look at the column reveals that many of the bas relief faces of the pillar hold what appear to be small gems.

The touch of a living being triggers the full lethal effects of the column. The victim must save vs. death magic with a -2 penalty or suffer death by a searing bolt of Negative Energy; an undead zombie is born! The discharge of Negative Energy reduces a living brain to fouled protoplasm 98% of time, but there is a 2% chance that the mind of the new undead remains initially unaffected; however, a strange appetite for brains begins to manifest within the day...

### Obsidian Plunge

A cracked archway that gives off a stone passage reveals a set of stairs seemingly carved of reflective black obsidian. The stairs are five feet wide, and the headroom in the chamber is only five feet as well. It appears that the stairs descend to depth of at least 12 feet in 2'-step intervals. To reach Moghadam's private chamber, it is necessary to descend this passage.

Each step interval of the obsidian stair (of which there are six) cumulatively drains one life energy level from any living being who sets foot on it, but not immediately; the level draining effect occurs only after the last step is used and foot is once again set upon normal stone. A successful save vs. death magic halves the number of levels normally lost (round down).

Therefore, someone who descends the stairs normally, using every step, instantly loses a full six levels of experience upon reach the bottom (three levels if a save is made)! Someone else who skips every other step could potentially lose only three experience levels (or only one if a save succeeds). Once foot is set upon the stair it is inevitable that the energy drain occurs, unless a being chooses never to move from the stairs again, which is ultimately a self-defeating proposition.

Each step on the obsidian stair can affect a specific PC only once. The function of the stair does not change if one attempts to ascend rather than descend the stairs; both directions are equally draining.

### Learning To Fly

The source of the irregular cold winds lies in this small 15' diameter chamber. Every 1d10 turns, a disturbance manifests in the center of room that resembles a cloud of rushing vapor, almost like an exhalation from an invisible beast. The extremely strong exhalations are the source of the winds.

Moghadam's early attempts to craft traps within the Undertomb often

relied on forging links to the Plane of Negative Energy. Here, his attempt to link to that plain of unlife fell short within the Inner Planes, in the Elemental Plane of Air specifically. The link is tenuous, inconstant, and functions only in one direction at a time. If anything wanders into the center of the chamber, it is immediately whisked via a magical portal to the Elemental Plane of Air unless a save vs. spells is successful. PCs who find themselves transported into the Elemental Plane of Air are imparted with velocity equal to a flying movement rate of 24; unless some means of propulsion through the infinite circling sky is devised, visitors soon drift far from the point of their origin in the plane.

Those who can maneuver on the plane and who can also pinpoint their invisible point of origin (requiring a successful Intelligence check with a -3 penalty) are close enough to enter back through the magical portal when the gate changes polarity for the space of one minute. (Each cycle requires 1d10 turns for the gate to reverse itself, during which time those in the Undertomb are again susceptible to involuntary transportation.) Anyone in proper position is hurled back through the rift, and slams into the walls of the dark Undertomb chamber with such velocity that 3d6 hp damage are inflicted to the unfortunate voyager.

The infinite plane of air is not immediately lethal to stranded voyagers, but unless the DM wants to pursue those sucked through the rift, affected characters are effectively out of the scenario.

### Antispell Waters

A connection between two areas of the Undertomb (as chosen by the DM) are accessible only through the white veil of a waterfall, which collects and drains into a nearby crack in the stone floor. Observation and sampling of the water reveals nothing untowards; however, anyone who passes through the falls is affected as follows: all magi-





cal spells, potions, items, and scroll effects are instantly nullified; and all magical items carried by affected player characters must make an Item Saving Throw vs. Magical Fire or be destroyed. (Assign bonuses to each item's save according to the strength of the magical to hit bonus and/or the number of item powers on a one-to-one basis.) Destroyed items are instantly rendered into charred, burning lumps.

### Residents of the Undertomb

Acererak ordered the excavation of the Undertomb ahead of time, always planning to use it to "discard" the builders of his secret stronghold. As such, there was never any plan for animate residents within the catacomb-realm, but the mass grave of the sealed Undertomb provided ideal fodder for undead stirrings, especially with the impetus of Acererak's later experiments into the realm of undeath; as above, so below.

By far the most populous undead within the Undertomb are wights. The wights are the animated remains of the common excavators who were slain and dropped into the Undertomb. Within the entire cramped complex are approximately 45 wights that are encountered at the discretion of the DM. Moghadam always has at least three of these servitors with him at all times.

### Wailing Wights

A few priests hired by Acererak to consecrate his new temple also found their unfortunate way into the mass grave of Acererak's treachery. In the fullness of time, two animated to form undead creatures whose abilities combine the ill attributes of wights and banshees; the screaming wail of these two former priests (hereafter referred to as wailing wights) has the power to temporarily drain life energy levels from living creatures within earshot! A wailing wight can scream once every round—all who hear must make a save vs. spells or be drained of one experience level.

Assuming a victim is still alive after an encounter with these creatures, the stolen levels return at a rate of one level per turn. The effects of the scream are cumulative, and those who are drained to 0 level are slain, doomed to rise again as a standard wight. Note that there are some similarities between wailing wights and what some arcane texts refer to as agarats; however, unlike agarats, the touch of a wailing wight inflicts permanent level drain in the same manner as a standard wight.

One of the two wailing wights constantly wanders the Undertomb, giving vent to its misery in a howl of pure pain; explorers have a 20% chance to encounter this wandering undead for every three turns they spend within the Undertomb. The other is always found at the side of Moghadam in his lair.

Wailing Wights (2): AC 0; MV 12; HD 8 + 6; hp 56,70; THAC0 12; #AT 1; Dmg 1d6; SA Touch causes permanent energy drain, scream causes temporary energy drain; SD Hit only by +2 or better magical weapons; immune to *charm*, *hold*, *sleep*, cold, poison and death magic, turns as special undead; SZ M (6' tall); ML Elite (14); Int Average (9); AL LE; XP 3,000.

### Moghadam

The most resourceful and dangerous resident of the Undertomb is the undead wizard-architect Moghadam, who was betrayed and slain with all the others by Acererak. The foulness of the deed combined with ambient energies later employed by Acererak himself together served to reanimate poor Moghadam; he became a creature similar to what the Wise might recognize as an arch-shadow [*MONSTROUS COMPENDIUM® Annual Volume 2*]. An arch-shadow is a creature of unlife that nearly achieved lichdom but failed, but neither did it die completely. In the case of Moghadam, his essence congealed within the magical matrix of his enchanted weapon *Ruinblade*, making the weapon a phylactery of sorts. With *Ruinblade* holding his essence, his for-

mer body still functions, allowing Moghadam to wander the Undertomb at will.

The dead wizard-architect controls the murdered workers, now undead wights, in a catacomb-realm of sorts, although not much occurs in the stygian darkness save for Moghadam's continual experiments within his sanctuary at the center of the Undertomb. Moghadam has no knowledge of Acererak's designs, nor even of the undead transformation undergone by his erstwhile lord. He labors yet with futile persistence, hoping that some new trap or spell that he perfects might warrant the attention of his old lord, thus ending his captivity in stone. Moghadam views living intruders as excellent fodder for further studies and sets out to exterminate them if his traps prove insufficient.

If Acererak's demi-lich state is somehow explained to Moghadam, the arch-shadow realizes that it labors in vain. After a period of reflection, it attempts to leave the Undertomb the way the PCs entered, in order to find Acererak and once again pledge his loyalty to his old master. (The curse of its undeath forbids Moghadam the free will necessary to unseal the mass grave by its own power.)

As an arch-shadow, Moghadam can drain one life energy level per physical attack as well as inflict 1d4 + 1 hp damage. (Unlike other instances of arch-shadow manifestation, Moghadam's ability to drain levels does not fuel his eventual transformation to a demi-shade.) Moghadam also retains his ability to cast spells at his former level, as well as to research new ones. A magical item of +1 or better is necessary to physically affect Moghadam. If his physical body is destroyed, or if he is turned (Moghadam turns as Special), his essence flees to his phylactery, *Ruinblade* (see "Arcana of the Undertomb" below). Unless *Ruinblade* is somehow destroyed, Moghadam's essence lingers and could potentially move to inhabit another body.



Moghadam, arch-shadow: AC 6 (0 with *bracers of defense* AC 0); MV 9; HD 8+; hp 60; THAC0 12 (9 with *Ruinblade*); #AT 1 or 1; Dmg 1d4 + 1 or 1d8 + 3 (claw or *Ruinblade*); SA touch drains one energy level, casts wizard spells at 18th level; SD hit only by +1 or better magical weapons, unaffected by natural sunlight, immune to *charm*, *hold*, *sleep*, *enfeeblement*, *cold*, *poison*, *mental attacks*, and *death magic*, turned as *Special undead*; SZ M (6' tall); ML Fearless (20); Int Supra-genius (19); AL LE; XP 4,500.

**Special Equipment:** *Ruinblade*, *bracers of defense* AC 0, *Codex of Silence*, *quill of bleak reverie*.

**Spells** (5/5/5/5/5/3/3/2/1): *cantrip*, *color spray* (×2), *comprehend languages*, *feather fall*; *continual light*, *deephockets*, *knock* (×2), *rope trick*, *wizard lock*; *fly*, *lightning bolt* (×2), *tongues*, *wraithform*; *dimension door* (×3), *extension I*, *polymorph self*; *dream of the earth* (new spell), *extension II*, *passwall*, *telekinesis*, *teleport*; *contingency*, *enchant an item*, *light into darkness* (new spell); *reverse gravity*, *silent accord* (new spell), *shadow walk*; *permanency* (×2), *prismatic sphere*.

### Arcana of the Undertomb

The items described below all reside within the private sanctum of Moghadam in the center of the Undertomb (or wherever the FDM sees fit to key it). Of course, these items and spells can be used individually in completely unrelated scenarios. A few of the items are always carried by Moghadam himself (see above), while the remaining items are negligently scattered amidst more mundane tools atop the stone work benches of Moghadam's sanctum.

### Ruinblade

The long sword *Ruinblade* has a +3 bonus on all attack and damage rolls. It appears as a slim length of flawless white steel. A thin sheen of what could be oil is always visible upon its surface, accreting most heavily in the flowing, circular runes finely etched into the



length of the blade. Apart from its other enchantments, *Ruinblade* never clangs, clatters, rings, or resounds even when struck hard against another object or weapon.

If *Ruinblade* is struck against an inanimate object of up to 700 lbs., the object falls into total ruin, becoming mere dust within 1 round. The power to ruin can be used once per week, and magical items receive a save on the Item Saving Throw Table vs. disintegration. This power functions only on discrete objects, never on living tissue or energy fields; however, this powerful blade also has an ability to ruinously affect living beings.

When *Ruinblade* became the phylactery for the arch-shadow Moghadam's essence, the long sword gained the ability to drain one life energy level with each successful attack against a living being. In the event of the

destruction of Moghadam's physical body, the arch-shadow's essence inhabits the blade, even if body and blade are separated. If a new wielder begins to use *Ruinblade* against living targets, the blade continues to drain one energy level with each successful attack; however, the energy levels drained are cumulatively stored by Moghadam. When a total of 20 life energy levels are drained, Moghadam's essence is sufficiently empowered to leave the blade and attempt to take control of the wielder's body in an attack similar to the *magic jar* spell. If the living wielder makes a successful save vs. spell, Moghadam's essence falls back into the blade defeated; to attempt another bid at possession, Moghadam must accumulate another 20 life energy levels. If the wielder fails the save, Moghadam commandeers the wielder's body, and the wielder's spirit is disincorporated and consumed completely. (*Raise dead* and *resurrection* spells are ineffective.) In time, the new body comes to look like the previous incarnation of Moghadam's original withered form. In the event that Moghadam's new body is destroyed, his essence again flees into his phylactery, *Ruinblade*, there to wait again for sufficient energy to inhabit yet another body. Only the final destruction of *Ruinblade* (a successful *Crushing Blow* delivered by any artifact-level magical item that saves against disintegration itself could do the trick) ends this grisly cycle.

### Quill of Bleak Reverie

This quill is made from a black feather plucked from the wing of a bleak raven, a species now long extinct.\*

\*Bleak ravens once winged through the night, their horrible calls audible even through thickest stone. Tales speak of the bleak raven's ghastly habit of gathering in the darkness near a structure or encampment where the elderly or the fatally wounded lay upon their deathbeds, struggling against the approach of their own personal darkness. It was then that the bleak ravens' croaking cries grew into a terrible din in awful coordination with the faltering breath of the afflicted. Rumors have it that a terrible lower planar fate awaited those who succumbed to death in hearing of the raven's dirge. These rumors remain unsubstantiated; however, it is no wonder that these once numerous creatures were hunted to extinction.





Once a useful tool for an architect, the *quill of bleak reverie* was corrupted by its present circumstance and is now suitable only for ill deeds and murder. The quill can be used normally to write notes or scribe letters, but its true enchantment manifests when the scribe draws the likeness of a creature of any sort, no matter how crude the sketch. When the drawing is completed, the magic of the quill animates the image, drawing substance from the Demiplane of Shadow to create a twisted nightmare version of the figure originally depicted. The creature manifested is black as night and always grows to the dimensions of a Size M being (7' tall or long, depending on the creature depicted). For example, even if a normal dog is drawn (or even a puppy), the pen might produce a huge, three-headed dog, snarling and slaving. If a sketch

of a face were innocently drawn, a severed head of giant proportions might rise up from the parchment to terrorize those nearby; the DM's discretion determines the final appearance of any creature produced by the quill. Note that any representation of a living being, no matter how innocent or poorly drawn, animates into a horrible creature.

The *quill of bleak reverie* can animate up to five drawings per week. The creatures produced uniformly possess: AC 4; MV 9; HD 9; THAC0 12; #AT 1; Dmg 2d4 + 1 (whether claw, bite, or other attack); SD Hit only by +1 or better weapons, immune to *charm*, *hold*, *sleep*, *enfeeblement*, cold, poison, mental attacks, and death magic; SZ M (7' tall or long); ML Fearless (20); Int Animal (3); AL LE; XP 2,000. The scribe of any creature created by the quill has the power to command the creature produced if the command is given within one round. The command must be something that the creature can reasonably expect to fulfill within one turn, or else the creature ignores the command. If the creature is left uncommanded, it savagely attacks the one responsible for producing it for 10 full rounds before dissipating. In any event, a creature produced by the *quill of bleak reverie* lasts for a maximum of one turn before finally dissipating.

### Codex of Silence

Acererak gave this singular volume to his servant Moghadam long before betraying the loyal architect. The *Codex of Silence* is bound in supple red leather and is sealed with an obsidian clasp. Within its covers are 64 sheets of the finest white vellum, all sewn to a spine of red leather with heavy black thread. The most immediately noticeable and disturbing feature of the volume is its front cover, which appears to contain the bulging outlines of a screaming human visage confined beneath the leather. Those who stare too long at the cover tend to have dreams in which they are surrounded by the silently screaming faces of unknown men.



Any wizard who memorizes a spell directly from the *Codex of Silence* need not use verbal components in the casting of that spell, no matter the normal requirements of the spell. Rememorizing the same spell from a different spell book does not grant the same ability to ignore verbal component requirements, nor do spells copied from the *Codex of Silence* and then memorized from the new volume grant this same special ability.

Each of the he spells contained in the Codex is set down one spell per two pages, save for the unique spells described below, which take more space. These unique spells' effects are in line with the volume's theme of silence; they never require verbal components, even if recopied into another volume of spells. The non-unique spells in the Codex are indicated in Moghadam's spell selection above.



### Quell

(Illusion/Phantasm)

Level: 2

Range: 30 yds. + 10 yds. /level

Components: S, M

Duration: 1 rd./level

Casting Time: 2

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: Neg.

*Quell* renders the target creature mute. The target creature is totally unable to utter a sound, no matter how small, not even a whisper, if it fails its initial saving throw vs. spell. In essence, *quell* immobilizes the target's vocal cords. Those affected by this spell can communicate only through hand gestures and written notes (if literate), while quelled spellcasters are unable to cast any spells requiring a verbal component. *Dispel Magic* remains a viable remedy for removing the effects of *quell*.

The material components for this spell includes a broken whistle that no longer sounds.

### Tongue Parasite

(Conjuration/Summoning)

Level: 4

Range: 30 yds.

Components: V, M

Duration: Special

Casting Time: 4

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: Neg.

This spell infests the target creature with a parasite that initially attacks the tongue. This spell is ineffective against creatures that do not possess tongues or analogs thereof.

The infestation takes the form of 1d4 small bumps on the surface of the target's tongue. The bumps are initially benign and remain so if the target ceases to speak immediately. For every word the target speaks after the spell has been cast, a bump swells and pops, inflicting 1 hp damage on the target and releasing a winged insect (similar in appearance to a horse fly) that thereafter flies annoyingly (but silently) around its "parent" until swatted. What's worse, each word spoken by the



target causes 1d4 new parasites to be born, each taking the form of a small bump. Needless to say, an entire sentence uttered by the target could be quite painful, while a short speech is potentially lethal.

Victims of *tongue parasite* who decide willingly to forego speech for a complete 24 hours "starve" the parasites; the swelling subsides to nothing, and the spell finally expires. Victims can choose to stay mute at any time after they are affected by the spell, but even a single groan necessitates another full 24 hours of silence. *Dispel magic* spells are ineffective against this spell; however, *cure disease* causes the swellings to subside and the spell to lapse immediately.

The material components for this spell are a living housefly and a muzzle of any sort.

### Dream of the Earth

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 5

Range: 60 yds.

Components: S

Duration: 1 hr./level

Casting Time: 5

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: Neg.

By means of this spell, the target (whose HD or level does not exceed twice the caster's) believes that it has just been slain by a *power word: kill*. The target falls to the ground as if dead and, to all outside appearances, is dead. In actuality, the target enters a cataleptic state that is impossible to distinguish from death. The target is unaware of the events that occur while the effects of the spell last, and instead is treated to a convincing illusion of being buried dead beneath damp, worm-ridden soil. While under the influence of the spell, the target is particularly vulnerable to wounding or mistreatment of its body; what only seems to be true could really come to pass if the target's compatriots are too hasty in disposing of the "body".

To cast the spell, the wizard points his index finger at the target and silently mouths the word, "die," lending credence to the spell's imagined effect.

### Light into Darkness

(Necromancy)

Level: 6

Range: 0

Components: S, M

Duration: Permanent

Casting Time: 6

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: None

Once this spell is cast, the wizard has 10 rounds to touch a living being before the dim energy crackling upon his fingertips fades. (In melee, this requires a successful attack roll.) If the spell is successfully discharged, the spell recipient loses his sight over a period of one round; as the light of the world fades into darkness, the victim's eyes darken to pits of utter blackness. This is the last light the target ever sees, as there is no



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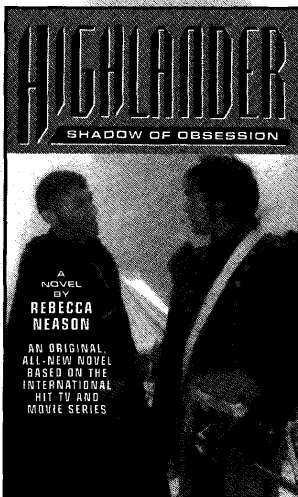
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save vs. this spell, nor do any of the various *cure*, *dispel magic*, or *heal* spells have any effect at all at restoring vision to anyone so affected. In fact, only a *wish* cast at the 20th level of ability or higher can restore the victim's sight.

The material components for this spell include a drop of pitch and a splinter of obsidian.

### Silent Accord

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 7

Range: 30 yds

Components: M

Duration: 1 turn/level; Special

Casting Time: 7

Area of Effect: One creature

Saving Throw: None

When *silent accord* is cast by the wizard, he influences the actions of the target creature within 30 yards by silent act of will alone. If the target is a living being with an Intelligence of 3 or more, it is automatically affected; no saving throw is allowed (but magic resistance still has a chance to negate the effects of this spell, as usual). This influence cannot go so far as to require the creature to immediately end its own life; however, the suggestion that the caster is actually a friend and that the target's erstwhile companions are secretly hated enemies is another matter. Urging an affected creature that a sharp plane of lightlessness is only harmless darkness, rather than the surface of a *sphere of annihilation* is likewise a reasonable use of the spell's power.

The caster need not understand the spoken language of the spell target; however, the caster must make clear to the DM the intended effects of the *silent accord*. Overly convoluted commands (as determined by the DM) or commands that obviously exceed the duration of the spell are simply ignored.

More insidiously, a target that is successfully affected by *silent accord* is auto-

matically affected by the next spell cast by the wizard at the target; the target automatically fails any saving throw normally allowed against this second spell, even for such destructive spells as *fireball* or *phantasmal killer*. The secondary effect lingers irrespective of the primary effect's duration of one turn/level; 10 years could conceivably pass before the wizard once again casts a spell upon the original target. Some consider this secondary effect the most powerful component of the spell.

The material component of this spell is a small figure carved of crystal (worth at least 300 gp) that the caster grips in one fist while casting the spell; the statue is consumed when the spell is successfully cast. The statue must generally depict the creature to be affected for the spell to work (i.e., the crystal figure must be humanoid to affect an elf, dwarf, or human, while the figure would have to depict a dragon for a dragon of any species to fall sway to *silent accord*.)

### Blue Earth

(Alteration, Evocation)

Level: 8

Range: 0

Components: S, M

Duration: Instantaneous

Casting Time: 8

Area of Effect: 20' radius/level

Saving Throw: None

When the wizard casts this spell, the ground upon which he stands is blighted with a deadly supernatural chill. The chill affects only a 20' radius around the caster the first round; however, the edges of its effect begins to spread outward in a slow ripple at a movement rate of 12, until the maximum area of effect is reached (20' horizontal radius/level).

In the wake of the expanding spell effect, the ground and everything standing, growing, or constructed upon

the ground is sheathed in a micro-thin layer of deadly cold ice, excepting the caster. The caster must remain still during the initial casting; however, once the spell is cast, he may move behind the dangerous "cold front" of the spell in perfect safety, allowing for the slippery surface that must be navigated. The contents of structures with solid walls of two or more feet in thickness are unaffected (unless a door is open), and the heights of structures or trees 30 or more feet tall are also unaffected by the icy coating.

Brittle inanimate objects within the area of effect must save vs. cold on the Item Saving Throw Table at the DM's discretion or shatter with the sudden plunge in temperature. Plants are killed outright, trees taller than 30 feet survive, and plant monsters suffer 6d6 + 6 hp damage. Living beings that fail to outrace the spreading area of effect also take 6d6 + 6 hp cold damage with no saving throw. Living beings (and plants) killed by this cold front stand frozen, and have a 25% chance of shattering if treated roughly within one minute of the wave's passage.

Once the initial wave of cold has passed, the danger of freezing is gone. Those venturing into the slowly melting area of effect need only take precautions against slipping upon the incredibly slick surface. (A successful Dexterity check is required to maintain footing for each round of melee that occurs upon this icy surface.)

The material components for this spell include a diamond worth not less than 1,000 gp.



*Bruce enjoyed the original Tomb of Horrors so much that he incorporated it, in whole or in part, in all of his campaigns over the last twelve years.*



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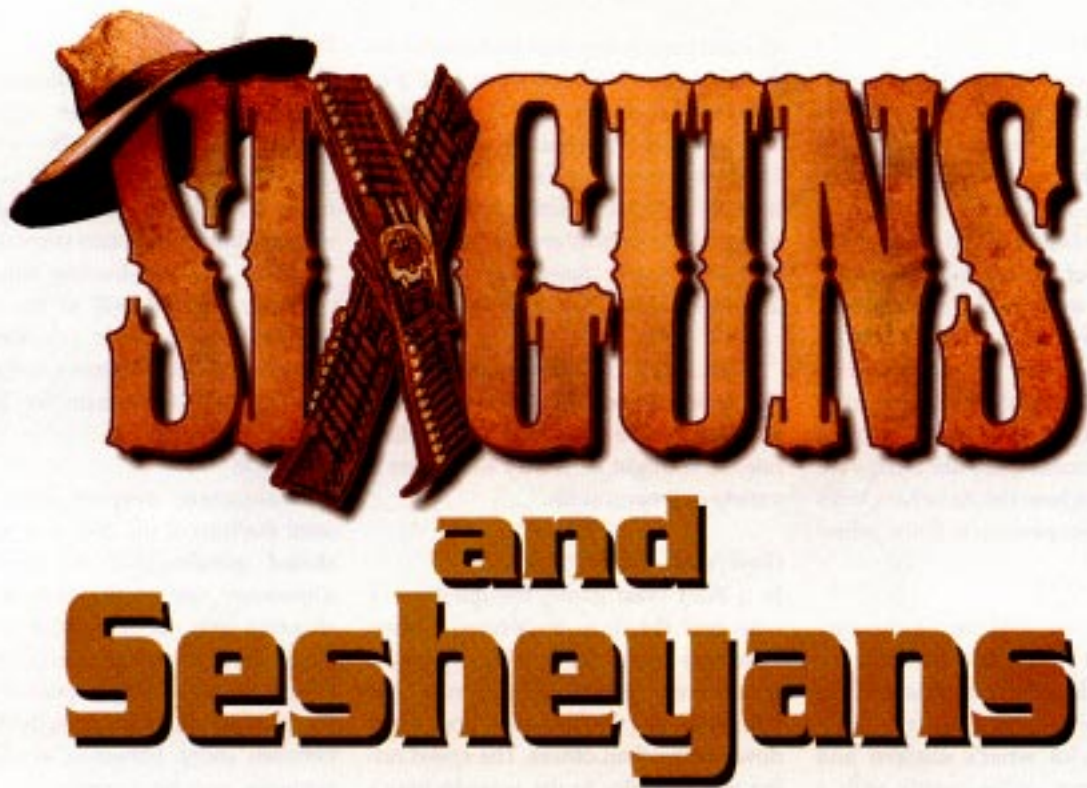
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The title 'SING GUNS and Sesheyans' is rendered in a large, bold, orange-brown font with a distressed, metallic texture. The word 'SING' is partially obscured by a brown cowboy hat and a long-barreled rifle. The word 'GUNS' is also partially obscured by the rifle. The word 'and' is smaller and in a simpler font. The word 'Sesheyans' is in the same large, textured font as 'SING GUNS'.

# SING GUNS and Sesheyans

## ***19th-Century Firearms for the ALTERNITY® Game***

Maybe you started playing the ALTERNITY® game for the aliens, the starships, and the futuristic weapons. But what about other genres? The ALTERNITY rules system is a remarkably flexible engine that can handle a variety of settings and campaign styles, including the Wild West. The 19th century is a great place to set an adventure or a campaign; opportunities for high adventure, exploration, intrigue, and horror abound in the frontiers of the world during the 1800s.

When most people think of the wild Wild West, the first thing that comes to mind is the gunslinger. Of course, there are plenty of other hero types in a Western roleplaying game, but the challenge of defeating evil with hot lead plays a major role in many games. A detailed and accurate treatment of firearms is one of the hallmarks of a Western game, so guns and gun skills are the main focus of this article. Everything else in the game system—history, personalities, non-combat skills, and miscellaneous gear—falls into the realm of “story,” meaning that you can get away with making most of the rest of it up. But everyone has seen a

Western, and they know what guns should and shouldn’t do.

Even if you don’t have any plans to create 19th-century heroes or run adventures in the Wild West, you might find this information useful for other ALTERNITY games. In modern settings, these weapons and skills are suitable for the thousands of outmoded weapons 20th century heroes might run across in unusual circumstances. In futuristic settings, you might use this information in arming the natives of the Progress Level 3 or 4 worlds high-tech heroes might visit. After all, you can’t have too many guns in a roleplaying game!

Add hold-out  
firearms to your  
ALTERNITY® adventures,  
or start your own  
Weird West campaign!

by Rich Baker

illustrated by  
Mark Nelson

## New Firearm Rules

Most skill descriptions and game rules work in the 19th century as well as they do in the 26th, as long as you're willing to apply a little creative license to interpreting them. In ALTERNITY, combat is intended to be fast and hard-hitting, sacrificing some of the trimmings in order to preserve a sense of cinematic action. Gunfights play such a central role in Western games that it's important to consider many of the details that the core rules set aside. Weapon skills, weapon speed, and mounted fire are three very specific cases where the ALTERNITY rules deserve a little expansion to fit the genre.

### Weapon Skills

In a modern or futuristic campaign, there's a clear delineation between the skill Modern Ranged Weapons and the skill Primitive Ranged Weapons . . . but the definition of what's modern and what's primitive varies greatly with a hero's background. A 1990's spy might regard a flintlock pistol as a primitive antique, so it's not unreasonable to move black powder firearms into the Primitive skill group for modern or futuristic characters. On the other hand, muzzle-loading rifles were common arms even in the Civil War, and a Westerner of the 1860's or 1870's (especially a Civil War vet) would view the flintlock as a dated but serviceable weapon. So, in a Western campaign flintlocks don't appear in the Primitive Ranged Weapon broad skill—they're subsumed into the Modern Ranged Weapon group.

To reflect the differences between shooting an old musket like a Brown Bess and a fairly modern firearm such as a Winchester repeating rifle, heroes must select which type of firearm—flintlock, percussion cap, or cartridge—to which their pistol or rifle skills apply. (The 'Skill' column in Table 1 indicates which specialty skill each weapon falls under.) When the hero uses a type of firearm with which he's not familiar, he may apply only half his skill levels (round down) to his attacks, and he must use the unskilled reload rate when he attempts to reload his weapon (see Table 2).

Example: A hero with Modern Ranged Weapon-pistol (percussion) 4 is considered to

*have two levels in any other kind of pistol use for the purposes of making attack rolls. If he were forced to use the 1873 .45 revolver, a cartridge weapon, instead of his preferred 1860 Army revolver, he'd reload at the rate of two cartridges every action instead of the three cartridges per action allowed to a hero with the Modern Ranged Weapon-pistol (cartridge) skill.*

Note that a character with just one skill level in a specialty skill and particular weapon type can reload at the skilled rate, so it might be handy to acquire a variety of firearm skills.

### Draw Speed

In a Wild West game, the question of who gets the drop on whom is often extremely important. The weapon's speed rating is an optional rule that reflects the fact that some weapons draw down better than others. The speed rating is a modifier to the weapon user's action check in the first round in which he attempts to draw and employ the gun. You might also apply the speed rating when the hero is attempting to react to a sudden, short-range threat during the course of combat—for example, when two characters both carrying their guns stumble into each other inside a small building. Otherwise, ignore the speed rating for the second and subsequent rounds of combat; after the first shot, the character's got his gun out, and he's shooting as fast as he can.

Example: *John Renner catches Blake Billings, notorious gambler, cheating at poker and takes offense. Both men go for their guns at the same time. Renner carries an old 1860 Colt Army revolver, a big hog-leg with a -1 step speed modifier. Billings has a derringer up his sleeve, a weapon with a -3 step speed modifier. Both characters make action checks for the first round, applying the weapon modifier. Renner's action check score is 13; he rolls a d20 minus a d4 (the speed modifier) and gets a 7, or an Ordinary success. Billings' action check score is 12; he rolls a d20 minus a d8 (for the derringer) and gets a 4, a Good success. Billings is going to get the first shot, due in part to his weapon's better speed—but considering that he's taking a derringer up against a .44, he'd better not miss!*

### Reload Rate

The reload rate indicates how quickly a character can reload his weapon. Typically, a skilled character can push three cartridges into a revolver for each action he spends reloading the weapon, but it might take several rounds to reload a muzzle-loading longarm. A character without skill in the weapon involved—for example, percussion pistols—reloads slower than someone who is familiar with the firearm. See Table 2.

### Rapid Fire

True automatic weapons don't appear until the turn of the 20th century, but a skilled gunslinger could achieve an impressive rate of fire with the right shooting iron. Double-action revolvers shoot about as fast as you can pull the trigger. Single-action weapons of the day required the shooter to cock the hammer between shots. However, single-action weapons can be fanned—the shooter holds down the trigger and uses his left hand to slap the hammer back. Either way, it's possible to get more than one shot per action out of a gun. Weapons marked with a fire mode of 'F/A\*' on Table 1 can be fired up to three times in a single action. The first shot suffers a +2 step penalty, the second a +3 step, and the third a +4 step penalty; see Automatic Weapon Attack Modes, Chapter 3 of the ALTERNITY Player's Handbook. It's not accurate, but sometimes accuracy doesn't matter as much as fire volume.

### Mounted Fire

Shooting a gun from horseback is not as easy as shooting a weapon from your own two feet. Table 2 summarizes the penalty for shooting any particular weapon from horseback. The standard ALTERNITY rule, described in Chapter Three of the ALTERNITY Gamemaster's Guide mandates a +3 step penalty for fire from horseback. Skill levels in riding reduce this penalty.

This isn't entirely fair; pistols and carbines were designed to be handled easily by mounted troops, so it's not necessary to apply the same penalty across the board. Refer to Table 2 for the exact mounted fire penalty for any given weapon. Heroes with skill in the Animal Handling—riding skill may decrease this



**Table 1a: Weapon Performance**

**Flintlock Firearm;**

Weapon	Skill	Acc	Md	S/M/L Range	Type	O/G/A Damage
.32 cal. four-barrel pistol	flintlock pistol	+2	F	4/8/20 yds	HI/O	d4w/d6w/d4m
.50 cal. duelling pistol	flintlock pistol	—	F	6/12/30 yds	HI/O	d4+2w/d6+2w/d4+1m
.38 cal. plains rifle	flintlock rifle	+1	F	30/60/120 yds	HI/O	d6w/d6+2w/d6m
.52 cal. long rifle	flintlock rifle	+1	F	30/60/150 yds	HI/O	d6+1w/d6+3w/d6m
.69 cal. musket	flintlock rifle	+2	F	20/40/100 yds	HI/O	d6+1w/d6+3w/d6+1m

**Percussion Cap Firearms**

Weapon	Skill	Acc	Md	S/M/L Range	Type	O/G/A Damage
.22 cal. pepperbox	percussion-pistol	+2	F/A*	4/8/12 yds	HI/O	d4-1w/d6-1w/d6+1w
.36 cal. Navy revolver	percussion pistol	+1	F/A*	4/8/30 yds	HI/O	d4w/d6w/d4m
.44 cal. Army revolver	percussion pistol	+1	F/A*	4/8/40 yds	HI/O	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4+1m
.41 cal. derringer	percussion pistol	+2	F	2/6/10 yds	HI/O	d4w/d4+1w/d6+2w
.52 cal. carbine	percussion rifle	+1	F	40/80/240 yds	HI/O	d6w/d6+2w/d4+1m
.36 cal. revolver rifle	percussion rifle	+2	F/A*	30/60/120 yds	HI/O	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m
.58 cal. rifle-musket	percussion rifle	+1	F	50/100/300 yds	HI/O	d6+1w/d6+3w/d6+1m
12 ga double-brl. shotgun	percussion rifle	+1	F	6/12/30 yds	HI/O	d4w/d6w/d4m*

**Cartridge Firearms**

Weapon	Skill	Acc	Md	S/M/L Range	Type	O/G/A Damage
.32 cal. pocket revolver	cartridge pistol	+1	F/A*	4/8/30 yds	HI/O	d4w/d6w/d4m
.38 cal. double-action rev.	cartridge pistol	—	F/A*	4/10/36 yds	HI/O	d4+1w/d6+1w/d4m
.45 cal. single-action rev.	cartridge pistol	—	F/A	4/10/40 yds	HI/O	d4+1w/d6+2w/d6m
.57 cal. single-action rev.	cartridge pistol	+1	F	4/8/30 yds	HI/O	2d4w/2d4+1w/d4+2m
.32 cal. two-shot derringer	cartridge pistol	+1	F	2/6/12 yds	HI/O	d4w/d4+1w/d6+2w
.45 cal. trap-door carbine	cartridge rifle	—	F	50/100/250 yds	HI/O	d6w/d6+2w/d6m
.56 cal. repeating carbine	cartridge rifle	+1	F	40/80/200 yds	HI/O	d6w/d6+2w/d6m
.30 cal. lever-action rifle	cartridge rifle	—	F	50/100/200 yds	HI/O	d6w/2d4w/d4m
.44 cal. lever-action rifle	cartridge rifle	—	F	50/100/200 yds	HI/O	d4+2w/d6+3w/d6m
.45 cal. trap-door rifle	cartridge rifle	—	F	60/120/360 yds	HI/O	d6+1w/2d4+1w/d6m
.50 cal. buffalo rifle	cartridge rifle	—	F	80/200/600 yds	HI/G	d6+2w/d8+3w/d6+1m
12-gauge repeating shotgun	cartridge rifle	+1	F	6/12/30 yds	HI/O	d4w/d6w/d4m*
.50 cal. gatling gun	SO-weapons	+1	A	50/150/400 yds	HI/G	d8w/d8+2w/d6m

**Skill:** The skill used to fire the weapon. Naturally, flintlock weapons use the Modern Ranged Weapons— *pistol* or *rifle* (flintlock) skill, percussion cap weapons use *pistol* or *rifle* (percussion cap), etc. The gatling gun is fired with System Operation— *weapons*.

**Accuracy:** The step modifier to the user's attack roll based on the weapon's accuracy.

**Fire Mode:** The weapon's ability to fire in single-shot (F), burst (B), or automatic (A) mode. At the GM's discretion, weapons marked F/A\* maybe fired on full auto at a +2/+3/+4 step penalty instead of the normal +1/+2/+3 step penalty.

**Range:** The weapon's short/medium/long range, in yards.

**Type:** The type and firepower of the weapon's damage. I-II/O indicates high impact damage of Ordinary firepower.

**Damage:** The damage inflicted by the weapon with an Ordinary/Good/Amazing success on the attack roll.

**No. Actions:** The maximum number of phases in which this weapon may be fired in a single action round. Actions used to reload the weapon don't count as firing actions.

**Shots:** The number of shots contained in the weapon's cylinder or magazine before it's empty.

**Cost/shot:** A rough figure for the cost of the weapon's ammunition.

**Hide:** The penalty assessed against another character's Awareness-perception skill check to spot the weapon if the owner is attempting to conceal it on his person. Some weapons just can't be hidden.

**Weight:** The weapon's weight in pounds.

**Availability:** The year in which the weapon becomes widely available. In the Old West, restrictions against buying or selling certain kinds of guns were unheard of. The Gatling gun is the only weapon listed here that might be difficult to purchase as a civilian.

**Cost:** The cost of the weapon in 19th-Century dollars.

**Table 1b: Additional Weapon Statistics**

**Flintlock Firearms**

Weapon	Actions	Shots	Cost/Shot	Hide	Wt	Avail	Cost
.32 cal four-barrel pistol	2	4	\$.05	+2	3 lbs	1780	\$12.00
.50 cal duelling pistol	2	1	\$.05	+1	2.5 lbs	1800	\$70.00
.38 cal plains rifle	1	1	\$.05	NA	9 lbs	1820	\$10.00
.52 cal long rifle	1	1	\$.05	NA	11 lbs	1825	\$18.00
.69 cal musket	1	1	\$.05	NA	10 lbs	1750	\$15.00

**Percussion Cap Firearms**

Weapon	Actions	Shots	Cost/Shot	Hide	Wt	Avail	Cost
.22 cal pepperbox	3	8	\$.05	+3	1.5 lbs	1830	\$20.00
.36 cal Navy revolver	3	6	\$.05	+3	2 lbs	1851	\$15.00
.44 cal Army revolver	3	6	\$.05	+2	2.5 lbs	1860	\$20.00
.41 cal derringer	3	1	\$.05	+4	1 lb	1841	\$5.00
.52 cal carbine	2	1	\$.05	NA	6 lbs	1861	\$20.00
.36 cal revolver rifle	3	8	\$.05	NA	8 lbs	1836	\$45.00
.58 cal rifle-musket	1	1	\$.05	NA	10 lbs	1835	\$22.00
12 ga double-brl. shotgun	2	2	\$.20	NA	10 lbs	1840	\$30.00

**Cartridge Firearms**

Weapon	Actions	Shots	Cost/Shot	Hide	Wt	Avail	Cost
.32 cal pocket revolver	3	6	\$.10	+3	1.5 lbs	1869	\$10.00
.38 cal double-action rev.	3	6	\$.10	+3	2 lbs	1877	\$28.00
.45 cal single-action rev.	3	6	\$.10	+2	2.5 lbs	1873	\$30.00
.57 cal single-action rev.	2	5	\$.30	—	4 lbs	1865	\$60.00
.32 cal two-shot derringer	2	2	\$.10	+4	0.5 lbs	1870	\$15.00
.45 cal trap-door carbine	2	1	\$.10	NA	6 lbs	1871	\$20.00
.56 cal repeating carbine	3	7	\$.10	NA	8 lbs	1863	\$25.00
.30 cal lever-action rifle	3	15	\$.10	NA	6 lbs	1873	\$40.00
.44 cal lever-action rifle	3	13	\$.10	NA	9 lbs	1866	\$35.00
.45 cal trap-door rifle	2	1	\$.10	NA	10 lbs	1871	\$25.00
.50 cal buffalo rifle	2	1	\$.20	NA	12 lbs	1866	\$125.00
12 ga repeating shotgun	3	7	\$.25	NA	7 lbs	1875	\$75.00
.50 cal gatling gun	4	12 (bursts)	\$2.00 (burst)	NA	150 lbs	1866	\$400.00

penalty by one step at skill rank one, two steps at skill rank five, and three steps at skill rank nine. (Note that penalties never become bonuses—this ability simply counters penalty steps!)

*Example: A hero firing a .45 cal carbine from horseback normally suffers a +2 step penalty to his attack roll. However, he has the skill Animal Handling—riding 1, reducing his mounted fire penalty by one step to a net penalty of +1 step. If the hero had Animal Handling—riding 5, he would suffer no penalties at all with the carbine.*

**Extreme Range**

In the right circumstances, it's possible to shoot a lot farther than a weapon's listed

long range figure, striking targets at extreme range. In fact, the extreme range of any pistol is twice the listed long range, the extreme range of a carbine or flintlock rifle is three times the long range, and the extreme range of a percussion or cartridge rifle is four times the long range. In order to take an extreme range shot, the shooter must rest his weapon on something solid (a log, a wall, or a loophole) and spend at least one action aiming before he pulls the trigger. The wind must be calm and the shooter must be able to clearly see his target. An extreme range shot always carries a +4 step penalty, modified by the target's cover and Dexterity-based resistance modifier.

What kind of guns did the heroes and villains of the Old West use? Well, it depends on which time period you choose to look at. The 19th century was a period of incredible innovation in the development of firearms. At the beginning of the century, the best rifle could shoot maybe 200 yards accurately and could be fired only three or four times a minute. By the century's end, most armies were equipped with high-velocity bolt-action rifles that could shoot 400 or 500 yards accurately and threaten targets as far as 1,000 yards away. Magazine-fed, these weapons could fire aimed shots 20 to 30 times a minute in trained hands.



## The Flintlock

The venerable muzzle-loading flintlock began the century as the queen of battle. The charge was loose black powder, poured into the gun's muzzle. The bullet was a lead ball, quite large by today's standards; flintlock muskets often reached .58 to .69 caliber, or even larger. The shooter had to use a ramrod to pack all this down at the end of the barrel. When the musketeer pulled the trigger, the hammer drove a piece of flint against a steel frizzen, sparking a small priming charge in a pan beside the breech. This ignited the main charge and fired the gun. All in all, it was a fairly complicated process, although greatly improved from the days of matchlocks. During the Revolutionary War, most regular army units were armed with smoothbore weapons accurate only to 100 yards or so, but rifled weapons began to appear in significant numbers, especially among the Americans. The famous Kentucky rifle outranged the British Brown Bess by 50 to 100 yards, and the best colonial riflemen could hit their mark at ranges of up to 300 yards in good conditions.

Pistols and shotguns (or blunderbusses) also used the flintlock action. While common pistols were notoriously inaccurate, duelling pistols were of exceptional quality and accuracy, lethal to ranges of 30 to 40 yards. Cavalry and dragoons often carried a brace of heavy, long-barreled pistols. Flintlock weapons remained common in the Old West and the military until the Civil War, despite their obsolescence.

## The Percussion Cap

Around 1810 to 1830, the flintlock was gradually superseded by the percussion lock. This device replaced the open primer-pan of the flintlock with a priming cap that was detonated by the fall of the hammer. While it didn't significantly improve the ballistics of the firearm, the percussion lock increased fire rates and made two important innovations possible: the breech-loading weapon and the repeating weapon. Both of these concepts were old ideas, but they were never widely adopted for flintlocks.

The breech-loading weapon saved the shooter the trouble of loading his gun

## Firearms of the 19th Century

**.32 cal four-barrel pistol:** This flintlock has four identical barrels arranged in a 2 × 2 array. Each can be pivoted beneath the hammer simply by unlocking and twisting the barrels by hand, providing the shooter with four shots before he must reload. Two-barrel and three-barrel variants were also common in the early 1800s.

**.50 cal duelling pistol:** A true work of the gunsmith's art, this weapon is finely balanced and generally far more accurate and deadly than the common pistol of the day. Many are lavishly decorated and sold in matched sets of two guns.

**.38 cal plains rifle:** The famous trade rifles supplied to various Indian nations during the latter part of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, these weapons were also popular with the first wave of white scouts and mountain men who pushed West before the Civil War.

**.52 cal long rifle:** The Kentucky rifle, a fine shooting piece that significantly outranges the military muskets of the day.

**.69 cal musket:** The heavy military musket, standard infantry arm in most armies of the late 1700s and early 1800s. The Brown Bess carried by British regulars in the Revolutionary War fits this description. Muskets were intended for volley fire on a battlefield, not precision shooting.

**.22 cal pepperbox:** A refinement of the multi-barreled pistols that marked the end of the flintlock era, the pepperbox actually rotated by means of a cocking mechanism in the trigger, allowing the user to shoot multiple times single-handed. Hundreds of pepperbox designs were manufactured, ranging from the practical to the bizarre.

**.36 cal Navy revolver:** Colt's 1851 Old Navy pistol was one of the earliest Colt designs to be produced in great numbers. Any medium-caliber percussion pistol of the era fits in this category.

**.44 cal Army revolver:** Colt produced .44 caliber revolvers as early as the Mexican-American war, including the mammoth Walker and Dragoon

models, but the 1860 New Army model was perhaps the best example of the percussion cap pistol. Many experienced gunmen carried it into the 1880s and 1890s because of its fine shooting qualities.

**.41 cal derringer:** The original weapon was produced in Philadelphia in 1841 by Mr. Deringer (yes, the weapon's been misspelled for years) and quickly copied by dozens of rivals and competitors.

**.52 cal carbine:** This weapon is the excellent breech-loading Sharps carbine of Civil War fame. Despite the fact that it was a single-shot weapon, it saw extensive service in the West after the war.

**.36 cal revolver rifle:** Colt's revolving action was never very successful as a rifle, despite several attempts to win over the U.S. government. The revolver rifle lets the shooter get eight shots off quite rapidly, but reloading each chamber took some time.

**.58 cal rifle-musket:** The standard infantry arm of the Civil War, this is the last muzzle-loader to be produced in numbers in the United States. A number of these weapons were flintlocks that had been refitted as percussion cap weapons.

**12 gauge double-barrel shotgun:** The shotgun of the Old West was a muzzle-loading weapon into which all kinds of junk and debris could be loaded. Double-barrels were also produced as cartridge weapons with a break or swing action for loading at the breech.

**.32 cal pocket revolver:** Many manufacturers produced small 'pocket revolvers' as weapons of self defense. Low-quality weapons of this sort were sometimes called 'Suicide Specials'.

**.38 cal double-action revolver:** The double-action revolver cocks the hammer automatically as the trigger is drawn, and then releases it when the trigger passes a certain draw point. It saves the shooter the trouble of thumb-cocking the hammer between shots. The Colt Lightning or Thunder models of the late 1870s are good examples of weapons of this sort. Smith and Wesson also produced a great number of double-action weapons of this kind.

## Firearms of the 19th Century (continued)

**.45 cal single-action revolver:** Beyond a doubt, the single most famous weapon of the West was the Colt .45 Peacemaker. While it might not have been the best sidearm in the West—Remington and Smith and Wesson also produced some fine revolvers in this caliber, and the old 1860 Army pistol was generally held to be a better shooter—no other pistol matched its combination of power, ruggedness, and availability.

**.57 cal single-action revolver:** The Tranter company of Great Britain produced this monstrous handgun for sale to British Army officers seeking a weapon guaranteed to discourage an enemy seeking close-quarters combat. Few were made, but they turned up in all corners of the far-flung British Empire. The Tranter shot surprisingly well for such an oversized pistol.

**.32 cal two-shot derringer:** Made famous by any Western featuring a card shark or a dance hall girl, this is based on the fine Remington pistols of the 1870s and 1880s. Derringers of this sort were produced well into the 1920s.

**.45 cal trap-door carbine:** After the Civil War, the U.S. Army began to consider what kind of firearm would meet its needs in the future. Astonishingly the Army settled on a single-shot breechloader as the ideal weapon for its troops, ignoring the repeating weapons available at the time. The trap-door Springfield of 1873 was the result—a weapon suited for a marksman, not for a soldier.

**.56 cal repeating carbine:** The Spencer carbine of Civil War fame, this weapon proved decisive in any engagement in which it was employed. While it lacked range and hitting power, the Spencer could produce ten

times the volume of fire that any muzzle-loader could put out. It was widely used in the West after the Civil War.

**.30 cal lever action rifle:** More than 700,000 of the famous Model 1873 Winchester were produced through the weapon's manufacturing run, which lasted until the 1930s. It was an accurate weapon within its relatively short range, light and durable.

**.44 cal lever action rifle:** The big brother of the 1873 .30 caliber gun, the Winchester Model 1866 was a favorite of hunters and frontiersmen.

**.45 cal trap-door rifle:** The rifle version of the trap-door Springfield, this weapon was issued to infantry units while the carbine was issued to cavalry. The 1873 Springfield was a single-shot weapon obsolete from the day of its introduction, but it was an accurate and powerful firearm.

**.50 cal buffalo rifle:** A number of small companies produced limited runs of large, powerful weapons designed to handle big game at extreme ranges. The buffalo rifle is a general catch-all for any heavy-caliber, single-shot, high-velocity rifle. Professional hunters downed buffalo (or anything else they felt like shooting at) at ranges of up to a half-mile, and sometimes even more.

**12 gauge repeating shotgun:** Many early repeating shotguns were lever-action weapons, just like the rifles of the day. The pump action was introduced late in the 19th century.

**.50 cal gatling gun:** Contrary to popular belief, the gatling gun saw little action in the Civil War. It proved itself in the American West. The gatling gun fires in full automatic mode, consuming 3 bursts of ammunition in each round of firing; its hopper can hold enough ammo for 12 bursts (4 rounds of fire) before it must be replaced.

fed weapons. Revolvers allowed the user to pre-load a number of shots in different chambers of the gun, rotating each beneath the weapon's hammer in order to fire several shots before halting to reload. Magazine-fed weapons had only one firing chamber but used a repeating mechanism such as a lever or a bolt to extract the round just fired and chamber the next round. (Clip-fed weapons fall into this category, too, although they generally didn't appear until the very end of this period. Both revolvers and magazine-fed weapons are still manufactured in great numbers today.) A hero armed with a repeating weapon doesn't need to reload at all until he exhausts the firearm's clip, magazine, or cylinders—he can just keep shooting, one shot per action (again, see Table 1).

Repeating flintlock pistols were actually not uncommon; two, three, or four barrels on the same pistol could be loaded at once, and the shooter would rotate the barrels by hand to position the next for firing. The pepperbox pistol used six or more barrels fired by percussion caps and rotated automatically by the cocking of the hammer. The most famous repeater, of course, was the Colt revolver. The revolving pistol used only one barrel with six firing chambers. These chambers, bored into a common cylinder, did all the rotating. This made for a much sturdier and more reliable design than the awkward and delicate pepperboxes of the day. The first Colt to see widespread action was the 1836 Walker Colt, a powerful weapon chambered for .44 caliber balls—much larger than any but the most bizarre pepperbox designs. Revolving rifles were also produced in small numbers as percussion lock weapons, but it would take the introduction of the metallic cartridge to make repeating rifles popular.

Percussion lock weapons were extremely common from about 1840 through the end of the 19th century. By the beginning of the Civil War, almost all flintlocks around had been converted to percussion locks, and the standard infantry weapon of the war was a .58 caliber rifle-musket, a muzzle-loading percussion lock gun. One more innovation of this era deserves mention—the Minie ball. This was an improvement on

from the wrong end—namely, pouring charge and round into the muzzle and tamping it down with a ramrod. Instead, a breech-loader allowed the user to open the back end and push the round and charge in from the back. Again, this significantly increased the rate of fire possible. It also made it a lot easier for a

soldier to fire from behind cover without standing or exposing himself in order to reload his weapon. In game terms, breech-loaders take less time to reload than corresponding muzzle-loading weapons—see Table 1 for details.

Repeating weapons evolved in two basic designs: revolvers and magazine-



the old-fashioned lead ball that had ruled warfare for three hundred years. The Minie ball was a conical bullet with a hollow base that expanded to seal the bore during its trip down the barrel, effectively harnessing much more of the powder charge than a round ball. Minie balls shot much farther and straighter than round balls, increasing the range of a black-powder rifle from 200 yards (give or take) to almost 400 yards. Minie balls were used in great numbers by both the North and the South in the Civil War.

### The Modern Firearm

The future of the gun, however, was not in the Minie ball. It was the metallic cartridge that defined the modern firearm. A metal cartridge containing the primer, the charge, and the round reduced the process of loading to a single step. The first mass-produced cartridge-firing guns began to appear in the mid-50s, and by the end of the Civil War it was clear that all new firearms needed to be chambered for metallic cartridges. The Spencer carbine was one of the first lever-action repeating shoulder arms, using metal cartridges to make its repeating action work. While the shooter still had to cock the hammer between shots on the Spencer, the rate of fire was astounding compared to the single-shot muzzle-loaders. A skilled soldier could fire maybe 3 shots a minute with the .58 caliber rifle-musket, but the same shooter armed with a Spencer could fire 20 to 25 shots per minute! Cartridges were adopted for pistols as early as 1851, but in the U.S. cartridge-firing pistols didn't appear in large numbers until the 1870s.

The last major innovation in personal firearms during the 19th century was the introduction of smokeless powder in 1886. This powerful new propellant was much better than black powder, making higher muzzle velocities possible while eliminating the choking clouds of gunsmoke that characterized the battlefields and shootouts of the Old West. Smokeless powder was a French military innovation, and for years the French army carefully guarded its secret—but eventually the

**Table 2: Weapon Speed, Reload Rates, and Mounted Fire**

#### Flintlock Firearms

Weapon	Speed	Mounted	Reload Rate	Untrained
.32 cal four-barrel pistol	—	+2	1 per 2 actions	1 per 3 actions
.50 cal duelling pistol	—	+2	1 per 2 actions	1 per 3 actions
.38 cal plains rifle	+2	+3	1 per 3 actions	1 per 4 actions
.52 cal long rifle	+3	+4	1 per 3 actions	1 per 5 actions
.69 cal musket	+2	+4	1 per 3 actions	1 per 4 actions

#### Percussion Cap Firearms

Weapon	Speed	Mounted	Reload Rate	Untrained
.22 cal pepperbox	-3	+1	1 per 2 actions	1 per 3 actions
.36 cal Navy revolver	-2	+1	1 per action	1 per 2 actions
.44 cal Army revolver	-1	+1	1 per action	1 per 2 actions
.41 cal derringer	-1	+1	1 per action	1 per 2 actions
.52 cal carbine	+1	+2	1 per 2 actions	1 per 3 actions
.36 cal revolver rifle	+1	+2	1 per 2 actions	1 per 3 actions
.58 cal rifle-musket	+2	+4	1 per 2 actions	1 per 3 actions
12 ga double-brl. shotgun	+1	+3	1 per 2 actions	1 per 3 actions

#### Cartridge Firearms

Weapon	Speed	Mounted	Reload Rate	Untrained
.32 cal pocket revolver	-2	+1	3 per action	2 per action
.38 cal double-action rev.	-2	+1	3 per action	2 per action
.45 cal single-action rev.	-1	+1	3 per action	2 per action
.57 cal single-action rev.	—	+1	3 per action	2 per action
.32 cal two-shot derringer	-3	+1	2 per action	1 per action
.45 cal trap-door carbine	+1	+2	1 per action	1 per 2 actions
.56 cal repeating carbine	+1	+2	2 per action	1 per action
.30 cal lever-action rifle	+1	+2	3 per action	2 per action
.44 cal lever-action rifle	+1	+3	3 per action	2 per action
.45 cal trap-door rifle	+2	+3	1 per action	1 per 2 actions
.50 cal buffalo rifle	+3	+4	1 per action	1 per 2 actions
12 ga repeating shotgun	+1	+3	3 per action	2 per action
.50 cal gatling gun	+3	NA	12 bu/round	4 bu/round

recipe was cracked by France's rivals, and by the early 1890s smokeless powder cartridges were adopted in most armies. Smokeless powder was the principal reason that gun calibers dropped around the turn of the century; in the 1880's, the U.S. Army's standard infantry weapon was the .45 caliber trapdoor Springfield, firing a big black-powder cartridge, but by 1906 the Army adopted the outstanding Springfield .30 cal bolt-action, a smaller weapon firing a higher-velocity round.

What's all this mean for the typical gunslinger of the Wild West? Chances are good that he carries a revolver of some kind, probably a Colt .45 or a .38 if he prefers a smaller weapon. Shotguns

or Winchesters in a saddle holster are pretty common, or maybe a big single-shot Sharps or Springfield if he wants a heavy hunting gun that'll drop just about anything on a single hit. Heroes who prefer to arm themselves more discretely might favor a small double-barrel derringer. In the American West, almost everyone went armed at some time or another . . . until the frontier had been pushed back further, and civilization tamed the lawless Western towns.

Combat rules don't completely define a game genre. To play the ALTERNITY game as a Western, you'll need to consider a few other issues first, including hero cre-

ation. Clearly, not every skill or character type should be represented in a Western game setting—mutants, aliens, and expert pilots just don't belong in the Old West.

So, what's it take to turn ALTERNITY into a Western?

### Profession and Career

In general, you can follow the hero creation process of Chapter Two in the *Player's Handbook*. The basic game mechanics remain the same for a Western; only a few of the trimmings are going to change to tune the game engine for Western characters. All of the professions except Mindwalker are valid in an Old West setting. (You might consider renaming the professions to reflect the setting; fighter, agent, diplomat, and technical expert might work in place of combat spec, free agent, diplomat, and tech op.) Many careers will still be appropriate, but a few—the comptech, for instance—just don't apply. Use your common sense in determining whether or not a character and his suite of skills and abilities seems reasonable for a Western game.

### Barred Skills

Most of the skills that are unavailable in the 19th century should be obvious. Broad skills barred in a Western game include: Armor Operation, Heavy Weapons, Vehicle Operation, and Computer Science. Specialty skills barred include Melee Attack—powered weapon, Modern Ranged Weapons—SMG, Knowledge—*computer operation*, Life Science—*genetics* and *xenology*, Medical Science—*xenomedicine*, Navigation—*drivespace astrogation* and system astrogation, Physical Science—*planetology*, System Operations—*defenses* and *sensors*, and Tactics—*space tactics*. Some skills may change in definition; for example, System Operation—*weapons* is the skill your hero should use for firing artillery pieces or gatling guns, while System Operation—*engineering* is a good skill for operating a steam-powered vehicle like a locomotive or a steamship's engines.

If you think your hero might need a skill that doesn't exist, feel free to make it up. Try to find an existing broad skill to park it under instead of inventing

new broad skills. As long as the Gamemaster agrees, you can choose any skills that you like.

### Money and Equipment

In the latter part of the 19th century the dollar went a lot farther than it does today. Heroes begin with 50–300 dollars (5d6 × \$10) with which to select their weapons, gear, and mounts. Since the prices listed in Chapter Nine of the *ALTERNITY Player's Handbook* are scaled to modern heroes, you'll need to adjust them by dividing the listed price by ten. For example, a pair of good boots costs \$100 according to the *Player's Handbook* . . . but for a Western campaign, you can say that they cost \$10. Any item of Progress Level 1, 2, or 3 is available for purchase. In addition, some PL 4 items may be purchased if the Gamemaster approves.

### Free Broad Skills

Human heroes normally begin play with the broad skills of Athletics, Vehicle Operation, Stamina, Knowledge, Awareness, and Interaction as free skills, chosen at no cost during character generation. Since Vehicle Operation is not available in a Progress Level 3 campaign (trains and boats can be handled under System Operation or Technical Science), Western heroes instead begin play with Animal Handling—a much more necessary skill in the non-motorized world of the 19th century.

### The Old West ALTERNITY Campaign

Could you run a Western game with the ALTERNITY game's aliens, cybertech, psionics, and mutations? Sure you could! Imagine a mechalus gunslinger, striding purposefully down a deserted street, his duster flapping around his torso in the cold breeze...or a weren tracker, trailing rustlers across the Dakota badlands, his fur dyed in Sioux war paint. The setting is as close as the nearest history book, but the characters and the adventures are limitless. Unlike the futuristic campaign in which every development, every aspect of society, may have changed from today, you can use the West as a common backdrop your players will recognize and include in their roleplaying. They don't have to start from ground zero; they've got a life-

time of Western movies and schooling to help them imagine the world you're portraying, and they can focus on the aspects of your campaign that are truly fantastic.

### Alienation

On March 28th, 1866, a fraal city-ship crashes near St. Louis. It is a slaver vessel, carrying thousands of sesheyan, weren, and t'sa slaves, born into captivity aboard the gigantic vessel. A smaller number of mechalus overseers and fraal masters survive the crash, too. For the slaves, the ship's crash heralds freedom, and they eagerly assimilate into the millions of humans around them; after generations of slavery, they have little of their own cultures left to give them an identity of their own. The surviving fraal are powerless to prevent the escape of their slaves, but they hold technological secrets and wealth beyond humankind's wildest dreams; they parlay the wreckage of their ship into vast estates and positions of power in the post-Civil War United States. The mechalus overseers are abandoned to their fate, reviled by the slaves they formerly brutalized but not important enough to merit fraal protection.

The former slaves struggle to make lives for themselves in a strange new world. Weren slave-soldiers drift out to join in the pacification of the American West, side by side with the buffalo soldiers. T'sa engineers join the industrialization of America, resulting in an explosion of bizarre new contrivances and technologies. Sesheyan homesteaders build new homes in the mountains and deserts of the southwest, taking up a nocturnal lifestyle to avoid the blazing sun. Mechalus sell their services as spies, gunslingers, and assassins. Meanwhile, the fraal who brought the slave-ship to Earth embark on a secret program of world domination, using their wealth and technology to bring the United States under their subtle control. Some fraal rebel against the slave-lords' plot, working to unmask the conspiracy. Others seek adventure in all corners of the world.

As you build your Weird West campaign, consider how the presence of aliens and alien technologies might influence historical events and personal-



ties. Might the outcome of the Indian Wars change? What would Freud have been able to do with the mindwalking skills of the fraal? Or Edison with the technological know-how of a t'sa or mechalus? Imagine Charles Darwin discovering a weren when he's looking for the famous missing link. Historical events can enter your game, too—for example, the 1885 explosion of Krakatoa was the largest volcanic eruption recorded in human history. But what if Krakatoa was something more than a geological event, something perhaps induced by the slave-lords in pursuit of their sinister goal? Be creative!

Space Cowboys

Here's another slant on the Weird West. The planet is known as Tombstone; centuries ago, it was a Green settlement, established by humans who chose to turn their backs on industrialization in order to live simpler lives than their galactic neighbors. For years uncounted, the great starships appeared, carrying new colonists, tourists and visitors, news of the thriving galactic civilization, and technological cargoes too valuable to do without. As the centuries pass, the great civilization in the stars beyond Tombstone collapses slowly. The starships come less and less often, until one day they stop coming altogether. Tombstone is alone in a silent and dark universe, a frontier idyll now left entirely to its own devices.

As the human and allied alien colonists go about their business, slowly forgetting the magical technology that had brought them to Tombstone, a dark and dire threat arises: Tombstone's native sentient race, a species once driven into exile on their own planet by the overwhelming technology of the space-faring humans. Now, as human society slowly falters, the natives embark on a campaign to eradicate the invaders from their planet forever.

What kind of alien creatures make up the flora and fauna of Tombstone? Who are the native sentients, and do they actually possess the ability to extinguish humanity on the planet? Is there any hope of compromise or peace? What kind of technological secrets might still exist, hidden in remote installations and

guarded by automated defenses of a forgotten age? You've got a lot of questions to answer with this scenario, but one thing's for certain—your players will never have seen anything like it.

Timeslingers

Here's one final option for an Old West campaign: The heroes are time-travelers from a future in which humans have made full contact with the various alien races. In the Wild West, they're unique, the only representatives of their species. A mechalus or fraal could pass for human—barely—but a weren or sesheyan would be hunted down as a monster, and a t'sa might be regarded as some kind of freakish new discovery from the darkest jungles of the world. The heroes might be able to visit the past and return to their own time at will, or they may be stuck in the 19th century forever by the mechanics of their time-travel device, a chronological suicide squad assigned to alter history in one specific instance and then abandoned in the past.

What if the heroes are faced with the mandate to create the future in which they can exist? Guided by a computerized record of events in the 19th century—some significant, others seemingly trivial—the heroes must ensure that, one by one, they guide events in the proper direction. Should they fail, they face obliteration as their timeline never comes to pass. Better yet, what if they faced an unknown adversary who sought to promote his own timeline at their expense? Each time their adversary succeeded, their own "hit list" of things to do and places to be might multiply threefold. Roaming the lawless lands of the American West, the heroes battle to shape a future they can only guess at.



Rich started as a designer with TSR back in 1991, after serving as an officer in the U.S. Navy. His most conspicuous credits include work on the BIRTHNGHT® campaign, the PLAYER'S OPTION™ series, and the new ALTERNITY® game system.

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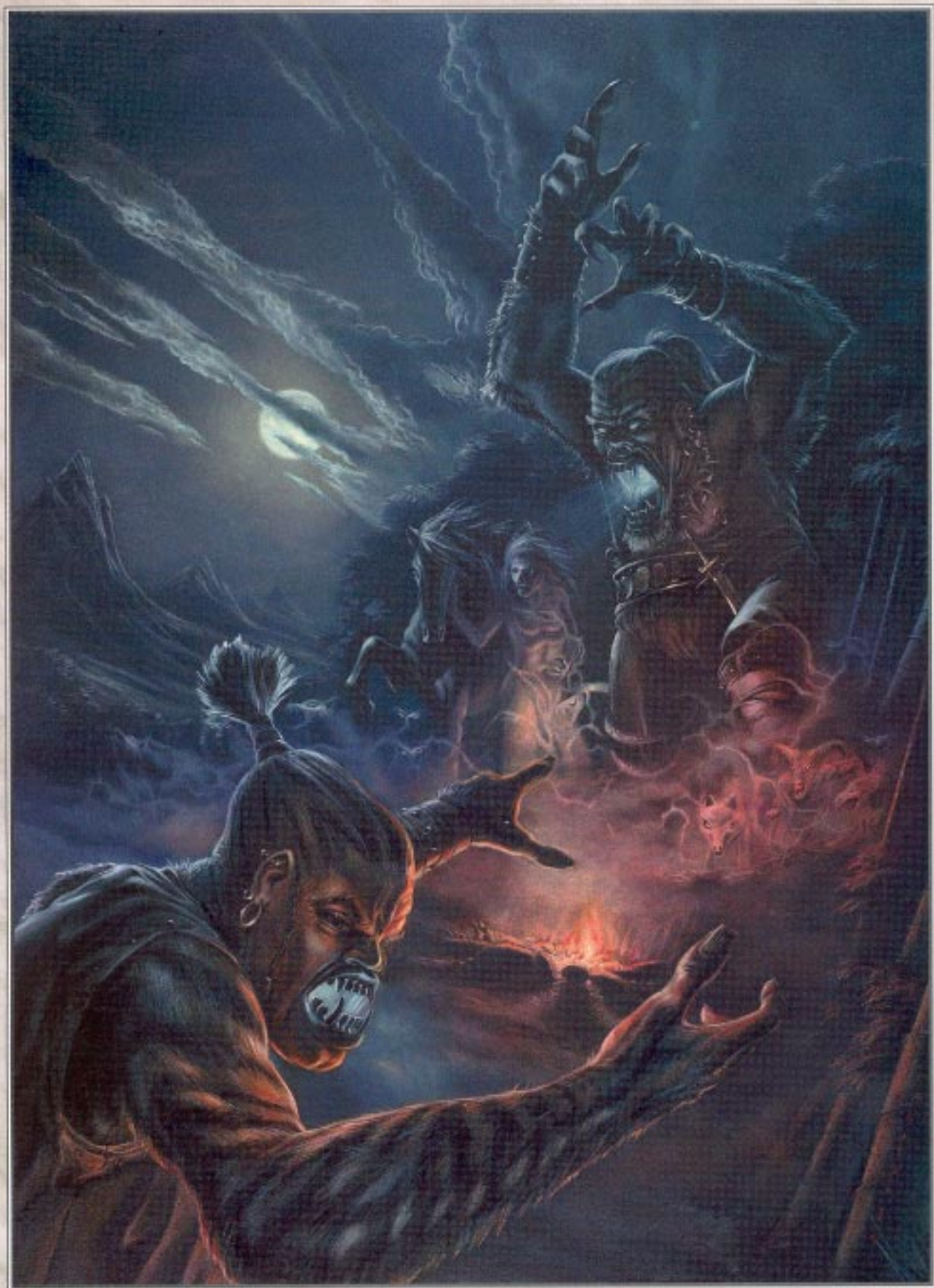
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# Wakes the Narrow Forest

by J. Gregory Keyes

illustrated by  
Stephen Daniele

Fool Wolf glared angrily at the ghost of his father. "Quit telling Yellowhammer what to do," he snapped, trying in vain to turn his horse's head back the way it had been pointed.

"Your mount knows his duty," the ghost replied. "He knows you were turning south. The giant country is north and east. You aren't much of a Mang, but you know that much."

Fool Wolf peered darkly at the cloudy apparition. It was still man-shaped but had lost its color. He could still see the intractable set of the old man's mouth, however, so well remembered from youth. Beneath him, Yellowhammer kept walking ignoring the pressure on the reins, as stubborn as the old man.

Fool Wolf could be stubborn too. He swung his rangy body out of the saddle into the tall blond grass, walked alongside the horse long enough to extricate his sword, hatchet, and pack. Dropping them to earth, he plucked a straw to chew, lay on his back, and studied the graying sky.

"What are you doing?" the ghost demanded, voice like leather sliding on stone. Weaker than before.

"Resting."

"We have far to go yet."

"Tell me why you want me to go to the giant country," Fool Wolf demanded.

"Because I am your father, and it is your obligation."

Fool Wolf chewed the straw thoughtfully. That cloud looks like a grass bear with a long neck, don't you think?"

The ghost was silent for a moment. "You spit on everything right," it muttered. "There isn't a camp anywhere that will welcome you—among all of the tribes your name is reviled."

Fool Wolf laughed. "I'm welcome enough, if not by chieftains, then by their daughters. I go where I want, I owe nothing ask nothing. There is nothing I cannot have if I desire it."

"Because you have no honor. You are not a proper warrior, you deny your destiny as a *gaan*, and now you even refuse your own father his last wish."

"I don't wish to be a *gaan*," Fool Wolf said.

"It doesn't matter what you want," the ghost hissed. The spirit chose you—"

"Old man, if you ever want my help, you will stop this talk right now. Not that I would ever forget what you did to me, but it's stupid to bring it up now."

"You still blame me? Your own laziness and cowardice—" he stopped, attenuated now to a thin smoke, and tremored. "I've come back to help you, son. Help you be Mang again."

"You have come back," Fool Wolf said, "because I got drunk and said your name, allowing your ghost to find me. You need something done in the giant country, something a ghost can't do, and I'm your only choice. Tell me what it is, or take Yellowhammer on and see if he can do it for you."

Again the ghost paused for a time. "So," he sighed at last. "It is good that I am dead, with a son like you. Very well. Give me something to smell—for I am weak—and I will tell you. But let me start with this; if you do this, you will be rid of me."

Fool Wolf sat up quickly. "You should have said that to begin with!" He rummaged through his pack, took out his bow drill, and started a small fire. He put a bundle of incense in the flames, pricked his finger and squeezed in four drops of blood. More reluctantly, he placed a small cup of persimmon wine where the fire would warm it.

The ghost leaned into the smoke, inhaling deeply, and color gradually filled him up. Now Fool Wolf could see the future of his own face—the same arched, narrow nose, sharp cheekbones and sensual lips—but withered with age. It irritated him.

"Not enough blood. The wine is sour," the ghost complained.

"I keep the good wine for the living. Tell me."

"A giant killed me."

"Too bad. That's what comes of going near giants."

"This giant is a very powerful gaan."

"So? Since your ghost roams free, he must not have gotten your name or your body."

"No. I flung myself into an abyss. I was lucky."

Fool Wolf snorted. "Yes, very lucky. You want me to avenge you, is that it?"

"No. I escaped, but he still has Slate Lightning."

"Oh," Fool Wolf said. The Mang and their mounts were relatives, descended in parallel lines from *Nagemaa*, the Horse Mother. Leaving Slate Lightning behind was like leaving a brother. Worse, it was told that the perfect mount and rider were often reborn together as one being, something every Mang longed for.

"Now you see why I need you," his father added.

"Yes. You need a good thief, and you raised the best."

"Stealing from one's enemies is honorable."

Fool Wolf laughed as he kicked out the fire. "Stealing gets me what I want, that's all. What I want is rid of you, so I'll steal Slate Lightning back. How many days' ride?"

"Two months, if the weather is good."

Fool Wolf sighed, picked up his things, and remounted.

"The weather won't be good," he said.

\* \* \*

They crossed the great River Woman by walking on her, beneath glacier clouds and bitter sleet. A week later, Fool Wolf found a camp of people who did not know him, and so stayed with them a few days until they began to suspect his luck at the bones was not all luck. By that time he had an extra coat, two more horses, a new iron gorget, and some fond memories of a girl aptly named Chattering Laughter.

A month later, he crossed paths with a trade caravan headed to the warm, lazy towns of the south—Wun, Nyel, Glittering Nhol itself. Grumbling, he watched it vanish on the white horizon. He had meant to try his luck in Nhol that winter.

In all it took four months to reach the edge of the giant country, mostly through the territory of the Stone Leggings people, who attacked him twice. The first time, when there were six, he lost them in the hills. The second, when there were only two, he gained two more horses, four gold coins, another hatchet, food.

\* \* \*

He saw his first giant in the town of Ruwtya. It lay sprawled in the frozen mud of the street, thick black hair matted like a bison's, ice crusted, face hidden in huge hands. When they approached, it lifted a head too large even for its immense body. Its arms were longer than its legs, and its shoulders bunched like mountains. Fool Wolf figured it weighed about as much as a horse. Small, bloodshot eyes stared up at him from the caves of its skull as it fought—and failed—to stand.

"Drunk," his father's ghost said. "Most of the giants in Ruwtya are drunks, slaves, or mercenaries."

"That's what killed you?" Fool Wolf said, scornfully.

"The giants in the forests aren't like that," the ghost replied, and for once did not see the need to elaborate.

Ruwtya was not a big place, but it was busy. It was the northernmost point that the caravans ran to, where the cities of the south bought furs, mammoth ivory, iron, lumber. Home to no particular people, it was inhabited by traders from the Nholish empire, Stone Leggings who had given up the horse life and settled down, mountain tribesmen the color of fishbelly. The streets were narrow and fetid, all too often blocked by supine, prone, or staggering giants.

He found a stable for his horses and sold two of them for twice what they were worth, then went to the common house, a long hall ten paces wide but some eighty long, half buried in sod. Its three hissing firepits warmed his frozen bones, and the drink they served—an unfamiliar brew that tasted something like honey but more like smoke—was *heady*. Settled on a bench and watching a couple of men playing bones, he contemplated staying in Ruwtya for a while, despite the ghost's constant pestering. It seemed a place where things might come ones way.

He was admiring one such thing—hoping she would come his way—when a giant came instead.

It crossed the room like a dog walking on its fists, massive head level with Fool Wolf's. At arm's length it stood, close-set eyes suddenly gazing down from the rafters. Muscles the size of his leg played across a chest as wide as the distance between a man's outstretched arms. It stank of damp fur, urine, and alcohol.

"You. Mang," It burred, in deep and reedy Mang.

"Yes."

"You come here to fight a Giant?"

"Possibly."

"I'm for you, then. That coat."

"What?"

The giant blinked slowly and tapped its chest. "You win, I dead. You get coat back. Get my skin too. You lose, you won't need. Good deal."

Fool Wolf blinked. Young Mang warriors sometimes came to prove themselves against giants, returning with tales of epic battles. Was this the truth behind their brave stories? Drunken giants hiring out as opponents? Probably.

"This coat will fit you?" He asked.

The giant poked at his garment, a finger as thick as a sword grip indicating the Nholish coins sewn all over it for decoration. "Coins fit my hand. Buy more wine. You ready?"

"Now?"

"Thirsty now."



Fool Wolf laughed, "I didn't come here for that."  
"Why else? Mang come here only for that."  
"Not this one. But maybe you can help me in another way, and thus earn something. I need a guide into the giant country. I'm looking for a particular giant."

The giants eyes widened and he swayed. At first he seemed to be sneezing but then Fool Wolf realized that the rheumy gasps were laughter. It leaned forward, fists on the table. "You go to fight *Forest Giant? Elder?*" He hooted a bit more, rapping the table with his knuckles. "Your name 'corpse,' then. That not who Mang fight, little man. Not smart Mang who want to live."

"I don't want to fight him. I just want to find him."  
"We need no guide," a faint wavering above the candle flame interjected. "I know the way."

"You know the way to get killed," Fool Wolf answered irritably, wishing the ghost had stayed outside. "I want to live."

The giant looked a little confused by his exchange with the candle, so Fool Wolf added, louder, "we have a deal? You will guide me?"

"What giant you hunt?"  
"I don't know his name. But the name of his territory is—" he struggled to say the word as his father had said it—"Uh-moko, or something like that."

The ridged brows arched, taking most of the high, sloping forehead with them, then collapsed back onto the small eyes like a mountain breaking. Without another word, the giant turned, dropped back onto its hands, and walked away.

\*\*\*

Fool Wolf paused in the birches, watching the hulking figure pull itself up the slope, dragging a sack behind him.

"You changed your mind," he called down, as the creature entered bowrange.

The giant raised its flat-nosed, pumpkin-jawed face to regard him.

"Yes."  
"May I ask why?"  
"No."

"I wonder how many arrows it will take to kill you, then? For all I know, you've just come to murder me and steal my coat."

The giant paused, then settled back against a tree, hairy paunch nearly hiding his squatting legs. He looked tired; understandable, given his weight and the steep grade. "Giant you hunt is my father."

"All the more reason for me to shoot you."  
"You go to kill him. You won't kill him. But with your help, I might."

Fool Wolf turned toward where the ghost hovered, a smoke as pale as the birches. "I'm beginning to like this giant," he said.

\*\*\*

The giant watched silently, sucking from a huge wineskin, as Fool Wolf wakened the Fire Goddess with his bow drill and asked her to keep the night cold from stealing their lives. As branches popped in her yellow teeth, Fool Wolf

rubbed his hands over the flames. "Do you know any of the local gods?" he asked the giant. "I should probably make an offering."

"Not know these here. Offer some fat."  
"They don't like wine? Most gods like wine."

The giant cradled his wineskin as if it were an infant and wagged his head no. In the shuddering light, he looked something like a child, with his over-large head, largely hairless face and forehead, his round-eyed stare. A child, or a very old and hairy man.

Fool Wolf chuckled. "What do I call you, wine-skin giant?"

The giant nubbled its fingers against its brow for a moment. "Dog," he finally said. "Call me Dog."

"Dog, what do you have against your father, that you would cooperate with an enemy to kill him?"

"Mang not our enemies."  
"We come and fight you."

The giant scratched his face. "We think you silly. Why anyone want to fight giant? But if win, more wine. If lose, die, maybe even better."

"Why?"  
"If can't live in forest, stay drunk or die."  
"Live in the forest then."  
"Can't. Father live there."

Fool Wolf tossed more branches on the fire, and sparks swarmed skyward. "Somewhere else, then. Another forest."

"Nowhere else. Father has *U'u'omqo*, all its gods, ancestors, wives. The forest awake only for Father."  
"But if you take his Uh-uh-mo—his territory from him?"  
"Then *U'u'omqo* awake for *me*, ancestors and gods serve me. My older brothers all dead. I try to take territory once—I lose. Very hard to beat Elder when the *U'u'omqo* wakes for him."

"Ah," said Fool Wolf, starting to understand. "How big is your father's territory?"

"Take ten days to cross."  
Fool Wolf nodded, thinking.  
"Why you hate your father?" The giant asked, waving its knuckles at the ghost where it floated above the flame.  
"You can see him?"

"Yes. He speak to me, too. Says you bad son."  
Fool Wolf stirred the fire, silently.  
"Yes, son, why do you hate me?" The ghost quavered.  
Fool Wolf jabbed a brand angrily at the shade. "You should never have done what you did."

"I wanted you to be a great gaan—you wanted that too."

"I was ten! Of course I wanted that! You told me the stories of the great ones every day, of Snap Copper, who stole the Moon, of Zha Yazhbu, who fought the Meat Mother and ran off with her daughter. You filled my little-boy-head with all of that, and then took me t-to—" he stutted off, poked angrily at the fire, and then looked back at the ghost. "You couldn't choose a *reasonable* totem for me. No, no. It had to be the most powerful god you could find. I trusted you, and you didn't know what you were doing."

"I wanted you to be powerful," his father said, paused, and then, "The old ones said you could be the most power-

When they lay quiet on her sleeping mat, a bit later, the giants were still shouting in the distance.

"How long will it take?" Fool Wolf asked, tracing his hand over the slight brown curve of her belly.

This is the longest of all his battles," she whispered, standing up and slipping back into her cloak. "I think you should leave now. If you're still here when my husband wins, it will go badly for you."

Fool Wolf was feeling generous. "Why don't you go with me?" he said. "I doubt he'll have the energy to chase us after shouting all night. I can protect you."

She looked at him in mild surprise. "I don't want to go," she said. "If I did, I would just go."

"I don't understand."

"It's good to be a Giants wife. I do a few things for him—things Giants can't do very well. He doesn't ask much of me. I never have to sleep with him, because he doesn't care about that. I don't have to look after children."

"But you seemed to like what we just did."

She smiled and bent to kiss him on the forehead. "It was nice, and I'm glad you came by. You were gentle and thoughtful, which few men are. I've had bad luck with men. You were nice, despite your rude entrance—"

"I was in a hurry," Fool Wolf protested.

"I know. But your flaw is that you would never stay with me, am I right? And then I would be back in that world of men, alone."

"I might stay with you."

"No. I can sense something happened to you. You were in love, once. Did she spurn you?"

Fool Wolf drew a skin around himself, a bit chilly. "She died," he answered.

"You see? It's better I stay here."

"I saw a woman with no nose—"

"Yes. Giants are better husbands for us. Giants aren't cruel like that." She cocked her head. "How did she die, your love?"

Fool Wolf sought for his clothes. "I have to go," he said. "Thanks for your hospitality, and—" he stopped as, reaching for his leggings, he noticed a saddle-pack in the corner. It was Mang.

"What's this?" he asked.

"Something the last man through here left," she said.

"He was after my husband, though he did not tell me so."

"How do you know?" He turned the pack in his hands. No mistake, it was his father's.

"He kept asking questions. Pretty sly, but I knew what he was getting at. Men aren't very smart when they aren't wearing clothes. He thought—he heard that the heart of an Elder Giant was a kind of medicine."

Fool Wolf cocked his head. "What sort of medicine?"

"To cleanse an unwanted god. For instance, if a gaan is host to an evil god rather than a helpful one."

"Ah," said Fool Wolf, breath catching in his throat. "Ah."

"Is something wrong?" she asked.

"Is it true? That about the heart?"

"No. Idiots get killed here every year trying to find out, but the answer is no."

Fool Wolf shook his head and knocked his fist against his forehead. "So stupid . . ." he muttered.

"Is something wrong?"

"No," he replied, tiredly. "I just hate my father, that's all."

He went outside, checked his weapons, mounted Yellowhammer, and rode back toward the shouting. One of the giants sounded very weak now, and it was probably the wrong one.

\*\*\*

He found them in the same clearing, though it was much larger, now, the bamboo burnt, blasted, twisted from the ground. Dog was still trying to stand upright, having a hard time of it. His fur was pasted to him with blood and sweat. A few small gods and beasts still hung near him, but more lay piled dead at his feet.

The larger giant didn't look tired, nor did the legion swarming around him. In the daylight he was even more impressive than at night, his body shivering like a plucked lyre string, humming with power.

Fool Wolf didn't waste any time. He wheeled Yellowhammer around the edge of the clearing, arrows whining from his bow. The first three sprouted in a neat cluster on the giant's chest, and were the last to hit. He shot four more, all true, but none reached its target, deflected by a shield of boiling air. But blood started from the wounds—that was a hopeful sign. He pulled his sword, as the giant followed him with impassive eyes. It shuddered, growled, and spit.

It didn't feel as if three separate things hit Fool Wolf. The blow that knocked him off of Yellowhammer was like a hand the size of himself slapping him. But as he sat up, dazed on the ground, he counted three bloody holes in his own chest. That was not hopeful at all. Cut wrong way. The bamboo blurred into green walls as his vision faded, but he noticed Dog making one last try, leaping physically toward his father.

Well, that was stupid, he thought to himself.

*Indeed. You need me, now.*

He shook his head. Had he slept? He was in a cave, low roofed, water dripping all around. Roots trailed down like the earth's hair. Beneath him was nothing, darkness, a few stars, but he wasn't falling.

In front of him was *Chugaachik*. She looked like a Dirk-Panther, black, eyes phosphorescent yellow.

"Where am I?" Fool Wolf asked the goddess.

"In your Bone Mansion, where you've kept me all these years," Chugaachik growled. "All I ever wanted to do was help you, love you. I came to you in good faith, and you keep me locked away."

"You'll stay here, too."

Chugaachik—now a great, black Jackal—laughed. "Oh, I think you'll change your mind. You are dying, you see, and when you die, the giant will keep you with the rest of his beasts, along with your father. Won't you like that?"

"Darken your mouth," Fool Wolf said. "He'll have you, too."

"All together, then. How charming. Or—" her grin split around to her long, pointed ears and her tongue lolled out "—or we could kill this stupid giant and be about our business."

Fool Wolf looked at the monster. "Yes. But I don't care for your business."

"Liar. It wasn't so bad, that one time, was it?" She was the most beautiful woman he had ever seen, dusky, black



giant stood up at the edge clearing that made Dog look like a pup. One Fool Wolf standing on the shoulders of another might be able to look him in the eye. His tree-trunk arms stretched up into the cave of night as if to pull down the sky. The gods, ghosts, and beasts fell silent, gathered behind him like obedient children. All, that is, save one, a stallion, coal black with ashy strips on his hindquarters, staggering toward them as if through a high wind.

"Slate Lightning!" His father groaned.

Dog trembled, but he inched forward, dropping to all fours and then raising up again repeatedly, a dance. "Now, Mang," he said.

"Wait!" Fool Wolf shouted. "Can you understand me?" He spoke to the greater giant, head thrown back, fists on his hips.

"I can." A Human woman said, stepping from the shadows. She looked Mang, perhaps twenty years in age. She might have been pretty once, before her nose and left ear were cut off.

"You cannot bargain with him," his father's ghost hissed. "You have nothing to bargain with."

"You can speak for him?" Fool Wolf asked the woman, ignoring the old man.

"He speaks through me."

"Good. Tell him I've brought him something then. A ghost that once escaped him," he gestured at his father. "His true name is *Sheshchugaa'en*." He turned to his father. "Sorry," he said, "but now I'm rid of you—as you said I would be—and you and Slate Lightning are back together."

Dog and the ghost of his father both gaped at him. Then the big giant roared, and his father jerked like a fish on the end of a sinew line.

"Son . . ." the ghost began, and then stopped, his mouth frozen in mid-word.

Dog let out a strangled cry of anguish. "You not help?"

Fool Wolf shrugged. "Sorry," he repeated, striding toward Yellowhammer.

Dog's whole frame slumped; Fool Wolf thought he would become a puddle. But then he straightened, and something hard glinted in his eyes, before he turned toward the larger giant and shouted again. For an instant, nothing happened, but then a portion of the beasts broke uncertainly from their pack and came to join him, crouching at his feet.

The elder giant roared and started toward Dog. Fool Wolf figured it was time to go. The whole forest shuddered with their calls, but everything seemed to be ignoring him. With his horses, he quietly left the clearing, picking his way through the dark bamboo. He could be out of it well before morning.

\*\*\*

Dawn came, a golden smoke drifting through his many-columned world. He was still in the bamboo, and the giants were still shouting at one another. Distance had not diminished the sound much, but had changed it. Their deep chested calls now sounded like drums booming in a deep cave. A horse-sized dragonfly with a body of molten sky whirred by, a wild god that was part boar and part bear crashed at the limit of vision. All night they had

passed, latecomers to the brawl. Despite himself, Fool Wolf felt a bit proud of Dog for putting up such a good fight. He wished one of them would go ahead and die, though. The whole territory was sunken into the Lake, and he could not find his way out of it until the fight was over.

Midmorning, he noticed the tracks of a human being, probably a woman. That was intriguing—even if it was No-Nose—and so, having nothing better to do, he followed them. They shortly brought him up a small rise and a clearing, in which, to his surprise, sat a small *yekt*—a house in the style of the Mang, with log walls and a domed roof of bark. He rode near, cautiously.

After a moment, a woman came out. It was not No-Nose, but a shorter woman, perhaps thirty. Nice looking, from what he could see of her, though she wore a heavy bear cloak. Tantalizing bits of thigh peeked from it.

"*Huzho, Shigiindeye*," he called, the polite Mang greeting. The woman stared at him for a moment, frowning.

"Have you come to try to kill my husband?" she finally asked.

"The giant? You're his wife?"

"One of them."

"He has more than one?" This sounded better by the moment. "They all live here?"

"No. Each one has her own camp. Did you come here to fight him?"

"Not at all. I came to give him something. Are all of this giants wives Human?"

She grinned crookedly. "Of course not. Most are giants. How do you think he sires children?"

"I was wondering that very thing," Fool Wolf remarked, dismounting.

"Stay there," the woman warned.

"I'll stay right here," Fool Wolf promised, holding up his hands. "As I was saying, I wasn't really able to picture—well, you know—though I was enjoying imagining part of it, if you know what I mean." He let his gaze travel a little obviously over her. "Anyway, I can't leave here until those two stop going at it, so I wondered—actually, could I step a little closer? This is straining my voice."

"A little."

"Good," he said, doing so. "And might you have any thing to eat?"

"Stay out here," she said, turned and went into the *yekt*.

He walked over to the door. "I was wondering—"

"Stay outside."

"I'm still outside, as you can see. But I was wondering if I could just step in a little bit. I'm cold."

"A little," she said dubiously.

"I was thinking you must be lonely for Human men. Did the giant kidnap you?"

"No," she said, stirring something around in a cooking pot.

"Can I come a little closer and smell what's in the pot?"

"A little," she allowed.

"I admire that cloak. Would you mind if I felt of it?"

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ful gaan in ten generations. I thought—" a peculiar expression stole across the shadow face. "I'm sorry, my son."

Fool Wolf felt his jaw drop. It was not something that happened often to him. "Now there are some words I didn't think you even had in your chest," he remarked, when he recovered enough to move his lips.

"I am sorry," the ghost repeated.

"And I don't care." He stood up and turned his icy back to the flame. Behind him, the ghost drew near his ear, whispering.

"I tried to—" the old man wheezed off and started again. "I know you are reluctant. I know you don't want to call her from your mansion of bone. But you will have to use she-who-dwells-in-you to defeat this giant. He is too powerful for a mortal man."

Fool Wolf shook his head. "I have a plan already, so save your advice." He turned back to the giant, grinned.

"Did we answer your question?" he asked.

"No," Dog replied. "But not matter."

"Don't worry, we'll beat your father."

Dog showed his chisel-like teeth, then gulped more wine. "Or die, this time," he said. "Almost as good."

\*\*\*

The land changed its mind often, in the next few weeks. It was mossy heath and shattered rock, it was spruce and Tamarack, it was frigid marsh. They crossed a snaking granite ridge and Dog hung back, his eyes flicking about like agitated bees.

"Here starts," he muttered. "U'u'omqo. Narrow Forest."

Below them, wind gods made love. Fool Wolf heard them, rustling and moaning, singing through the bamboo, pushing pale ripples across the swaying tips all the way to the mountain-clouded horizon. It did not look narrow.

"How do we find him in there?" Fool Wolf asked.

The giant choked out his humorless laugh. "He find us. You have wine?"

"You drank the last a week ago."

Dog nodded sadly, blinked slowly, and started down the slope.

The cane spoke to them in a tongue of hushed rattles, enclosed them in a cage of a million bars. Within, the name the giant had given it made more sense. The dead shafts from the years before were thicker than his thigh and as tall as a splintpine, the new spring growth still mostly head-high shoots. The giant pulled up the young ones and ate them as they went along, somewhat defiantly. "Father's food," he would mumble, now and then. But Dog belonged here. Even Fool Wolf—who did not care—could see that. His charcoal-and-umber streaked fur was a shadow of cane, and he eased his suddenly graceful bulk through the forest with almost no sound, something Fool Wolf, Yellowhammer, and the other horses certainly could not do. He was a different creature from that pitiful thing in Ruwtya.

Toward sundown, they found a place where all of the cane had been tramped down, and the young shoots were gone. Despite Dog's protests, Fool Wolf elected to camp there, where he could at least see a little spot of sky. Fool Wolf took out his sword-fine steel, stolen from a Swamp Kingdoms mercenary—and began to sharpen it.

"Sword not help you against father," Dog opined. "Cut wrong way."

Fool Wolf kept whetting. "Maybe not. What do you plan to do?"

"Call him dead."

"That's quite a plan," Fool Wolf remarked. "I thought you might hit him or strangle him or something."

"Call not right word. No word in your language."

"Well, then. You said I could help. How?"

The giant munched on a bamboo shoot, mouth grinding like a cows. "I never beat father if just him and me. While I call, you protect me. Distract father."

"That should be easy enough. I've been told I'm distracting."

He was more or less satisfied with his edge, so resheathed the weapon. He was about to ask Dog what he meant by 'cut wrong way' when he noticed something wrong.

Whippoorwills had been singing since sundown, but now their glissando lamentations were in unison, joined by the ululating shrieks of shrew owls, frogs, and thuttering bats. All the night beasts crying together, as if they were following the slow beat of a drum.

Or a heartbeat.

Fool Wolf scrambled to his feet, an instant or so before Dog.

"Search in your mansion of bone," his father hissed.

"Release the goddess! Quickly. I could not defeat him, but you can."

Fool Wolf shot the old man a glance, and that was what he saw—not a pale shadow, but the old man himself, as he had been in the flesh, solid.

"We're under the *Lake*," he realized, aloud.

Dog scrunched his brow. "Lake?"

"The world is like a lake. We live above the surface, the gods and spirits below it. Gaans can travel beneath, to the otherworld, through the skins of their drums, but it isn't easy. The head of the drum is the surface of the lake, and beating makes ripples—" he trailed off, because Dog was nodding.

"Understand. Father need no drum. Where father walk, is all the same, below Lake, above it. Where father walk, always ripples. He walk, now. Forest awake."

As if to prove this, the bamboo rustled, as though swarming with locusts, and indeed, Fool Wolf felt hundreds of small things slapping into his face, arms and legs. When he caught one in his hands, it became a cool wisp of air. All around him, larger, more worrisome gods began crawling from their deep pools, burrowing out of the earth, climbing through the tops of the bamboo, singing as animals and Human Beings cannot sing. Eyes appeared at the clearings edge, catching the fire and laughing it back at them. Slope shouldered canines, neither wolf nor dog, paced at the rim of vision.

Dog towered up on two legs, stretched his arms wide, and roared. Roar was actually not the right word—it was more like some sky filling trumpet, sonorous, brassy. He did it again.

An answer came that swept his voice away like a cottonwood leaf in a tornado. Fool Wolf felt it in his marrow, as each pair of eyes, each invisible god answered, and a



hair with just a hint of a curl in it, naked body retaining something of the cat.

Fool Wolf stabbed a finger at her. "I'll be rid of you."

"Maybe one day. Not if you die now. Better choose."

Fool Wolf bit his lip until blood came, knowing she was right. He closed his eyes, and willed open her dwelling. "Let's go then," he snarled.

He opened his eyes as Dog fell. Fool Wolf leapt, a cat made of lightning a running flame. The big Giant saw him coming at the last second, and then Fool Wolf was on him, tearing through his spirit guardians, sinking claw and teeth into giant flesh. The small gods fell away from them, confused. The Giant, swinging his huge arms too slowly, opened his mouth to Call.

Full Wolf tore his voice out, and most of his throat, too.

\*\*\*

He awoke, painted in blood. He was in the woman's yekt, and she was outside, spread-eagle, lidless eyes set sightless on the sun. Fool Wolf put his head down, and for the first time in many years, he wept.

*Don't be so pitiful, a voice in him said. It was fun, and you know it.*

"I won't call on you again," Fool Wolf snarled. "Ever."

*You said that when we did those fun things with your other sweet lover— what was her name?*

Fool Wolf clenched his jaw and forced the gates of his heart shut. He could do it, when she was sated, when it was too late. The voice faded, was silent, leaving him with only his own sobs.

A moment later, he heard footsteps and looked up to see Dog crossing the yard, limping and dragging one bloody arm. Behind him came a strange ghost, one with the body of a horse but the upper torso of a man joined to it where head and neck ought to be.

"The legends are true, then," he whispered.

"My son," the ghost said. "What have you done here?"

Dog too, was staring at the woman's remains. Why?" He croaked.

Fool Wolf put his head down. "You'll have to find new wives, Dog."

"All?"

He nodded slightly, then glanced up at the horse-man-ghost. "You see why I don't want to be a gaan, now, father?"

"I didn't know it was *Chugaachik*, I swear to you. I thought she was a different spirit, an ordinary lion goddess. She tricked me."

"Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"I never knew, until yesterday. A ghost can see what a foolish man cannot." His face twisted. "I never understood. You were right to give me to the giant. You should have left me with him."

"You never believed me. You always thought it was just because I was weak. Yet you came all of the way here and got killed trying to cure me."

The ghost looked away and shrugged.

Fool wolf wiped his face, got up, and started to gather his things, trying not to look at the woman or remember the others, the children.

"I won't be calling your name again," he said, very softly. "And I doubt that I'll ever roam the same plains as you. Be free."

"Thank you, my son."

"Go."

And the ghost went, like a candle winking out.

Dog was squatting on the ground. "Why you kill my wives?" he moaned.

Fool Wolf flicked him a weary glance. What excuse could he give that the giant would understand? None.

"It's better not to inherit too much from your father," he murmured.

He mounted Yellowhammer, leaving the Giant rocking there, and rode south. He would go the long way, past Ruwtya, and thence to the Swamp Kingdoms. That would take two or three months, four if he dallied. By then he should be ready for a drink, a game of bones, a little pleasure. By then he would be able to look another person in the face and smile.



*Greg Keyes finds the inspiration for his fiction in the cultures he studies as an anthropologist. As preparation for his latest novel, he recently took up fencing—research with a point.*





## THE DARK LADY

## Nurvureem



For those who enter  
Rundreth's gloom  
Go willingly  
to waiting doom.

—from *My Lady of Shadows*  
by Inder Braelen  
*Year of the Wave*

Ed Greenwood

Illustrated by  
Storn Cook

IN A GRASSY BANK OVERLOOKING THE LONG road north of Amphail stands Rundreth Manor, once home to the warrior-adventurer Galath Rundreth (whose bones lie somewhere in the wood that used to be its back garden). A succession of rougher owners followed Rundreth, most of them using the many-pillared house as little more than a cave to shelter in between raids or hunting expeditions. These included the Brothers Skladdar (who grew wilder than the beasts they trapped, and whose skins they wore) and Emvorele the Gentle Blade (an elven coach robber as skilled as she was small; she stood four feet tall in battle-boots and swung a sword the size of a fire-skewer).

About twenty years ago, most of the manor's roof fell in, and a battle between rival adventuring bands both seeking to camp in what was left of the once-grand stone mansion caused two of its pillars to topple, crushing three men beneath their bulk and gaining Rundreth Manor a reputation for being haunted. Inevitably, folk of Amphail and passing merchants saw the ghosts of the dead adventurers watching them from the ruins.

The truth was probably less poetic. Outlaws have done a little howling and a little melting noiselessly away into concealment and have been dubbed "ghosts" before. Yet everyone seems to agree that the Dark Lady who haunts Rundreth Manor now is something different—something that brings death to many handsome young men, sending

others away alive but changed. The survivors return with a faraway look in their eyes and doom riding their shoulders like a dark, tattered cloak that curls and switches of its own volition.

It's certain the young male adventurers lured to Rundreth believe they're in the company of someone very much alive—and that the fearful few who come equipped to slay a vampire find no such foe and are persuaded to set aside their weapons by a friendly lady. Some who've seen this Dark Lady say she's small of stature, catlike in her grace, and clad in too little to conceal any weapon.

And yet man after man of the young warriors who enter Rundreth is found dead—torn apart as if by great jaws and tossed out onto the road, piece by piece, for flies and passersby to find.



If we can believe the ballad of the minstrel Inder Braelen (who returned to the Manor several times before disappearing there four winters ago), the Lady brings men to the ruined house by the score for purposes of seduction—or to rob and slay them. She usually kills such paramours but lets the occasional one go. Those who spread word of what happened to them, such as Inder, soon disappear. Those who hold their peace and remain friendly to the Dark Lady are suffered to live. Inder claimed that some of these men remain her willing servants lifelong, obviously still fostering a love for her.

Inder's ballad lays bare two secrets of the Lady. Her habits, love of concealment, and the illusion magics she wields conceal her true nature from all save those who become her intimates—that she is a drow. Inder saw something more. The Dark Lady was more than a dark elf, or else a drow who could *shapechange* at will.

Certain Harpers—one lover of the Dark Lady among them—know rather more about the deadly lady of Rundreth Manor, and between what Volo learned from them and what he'd overheard at a Mage Fair (before his writings made him widely unpopular among mages), he pieced together the truth about the Dark Lady, facts Elminster has confirmed.

Her name is Nurvureem, and she is a drow . . . and more. In fact, she's a drow weredragon, a drow who can change to a shadow dragon at will. A few veteran Harpers call her "the Drow Dragon."

Her origins are unknown even to her, but some Harpers have speculated that Nurvureem may be the last surviving

offspring of an isolated drow enclave who were enslaved by shadow dragons in the remote northeastern Sword Coast North over a thousand years ago, and after many centuries broke free of their servitude by mastering enough magic. It must be emphasized that this "origin" is pure speculation. Nurvureem has more than once revealed that she's been alone

tative forays that occurred only in fog, stormgloom, or the darkness of night.

Nurvureem shuns the company of other drow and worships no deity, drow or otherwise. Only human, half-elven, and elven mages customarily impress her; she treats such individuals with gentle care until she's taken her measure of their power and decided whether she should seduce them, remain hidden, seize items and spellbooks while they sleep, or simply attack.

The Dark Lady's seductions seem designed to win long-time friends and perhaps a mate. Friends who later prove to be weaklings or who turn against her become coerced allies, fearful servants, or—most often—swiftly dead at her hands. Only Nurvureem knows what she truly seeks and whether she can come to trust any other being.

From her deeds and words passed on by men she's entertained in ruined Rundreth, we know that Nurvureem is lonely, probably less than sane, and unrepentantly evil. She openly delights in theft and cruel pranks such as misdirecting caravans over cliffs. On at least three occasions she's tricked mages into attacking the isolated homes of other mages, then tried to slay both wizards while they dueled, or to steal what magic she could during the fray.

She exults in slaughter and in viewing the destruction wrought by others, yet she can also be tender and vulnerable, seeking both affection and protection. On one occasion, she offered her throat to a wary Harper, drew his own dagger and put it into his hand, bidding him strike if he thought it best. The Harper found he could not bring himself to slay her. He insists that she had placed herself, tilting her head back over one of his arms and wrapping his cloak around and around her own arms to thoroughly bind them out of the way,



IT'S CERTAIN THE YOUNG MALE ADVENTURERS lured to Rundreth believe they're in the company of someone very much alive . . .

and wandering for as long as she can remember, with no memory of parents or even a time when she was young. She does recall a time when she hated sunlight and lurked in caves that come to the surface somewhere near Triboar, exploring the surface world only in ten-

killing stroke had he delivered one. Her submission might have been a clever gamble, but it wasn't a trick—no change to dragon form or sudden movement could have saved her. Many Harpers who heard the tale consider it clear evidence of her insanity; a few others are more charitable in their views.

All accounts agree that, whenever she's attacked in earnest, Nurvureem changes to shadow dragon form, though she can use her spell-like draconic powers when in drow shape and when (as a drow) she's maintaining a human semblance through the use of illusion.

First mentioned in travelers' journals circa 1304 D.R., Nurvureem initially roamed a fairly small area of the North, ranging east and southeast from Triboar as far as the High Forest (never going north or west). In recent decades, she's known to have followed the trade routes as far south as Baldur's Gate, lingering near Daggerford, and up the Delimbiyr as far as Secomber. She stayed in the Bargewright Inn for two seasons, wreaking such havoc that local Harpers persuaded a drow priestess of Eilistraee to join them in ousting her. At their first confrontation, Nurvureem screamed in rage and fled, lurking in the wilderlands for almost a year.

**T**he Harper found

he could not bring himself to slay her.

A mage who one night conjured the illusion of a drow warband to drive away Nurvureem reported that she was "visibly upset" by the sight, even though she evidently knew it to be only an image and not a real group of dark elves. The Drow Dragon seems to avoid cities, large caravan camps, and anywhere that is home to noise, bustling activity, and lots of folk. On at least two occasions, she's taken rural employment as a "shroud-spinner," preparing the bodies of the dead for burial, so as to gain a ready supply of carrion to dine upon

she's employed a variety of outward appearances and aliases, but she always dwells alone. To all outward appearances, Nurvureem is a very talented



seamstress who seems able to see and function perfectly in the dark. When in this guise, she is always prepared for attacks; her cottages have alarm-warning traps, such as balanced buckets of old metal scrap and tripwires, set ready against intrusion.

When in dragon form, Nurvureem is believed to be in all respects an adult shadow dragon. She can employ her draconic ability to converse with any intelligent creature, as well as the spells she gains as a shadow dragon, while she's in any form.

The Drow Dragon has no one true lair but maintains several hideaways and magic caches across the North. One is a tumbledown cottage in the hills east of Red Larch surrounded by monster skeletons to deter casual explorations; another is a dry gulch (large enough to hold a shadow dragon lying flat, and hiding healing potions under tumbled boulders at its heart) in the gently rolling hills west of the High Forest and east of Beliard.

A third is known to be a cave high in a mountainside or rocky height somewhere near the area Nurvureem is known to roam—but just which pinnacle, Volo was unable to learn.

To Nurvureem, lairs seem little more than places to hide from prying eyes and keep a little magic hidden for emergencies. Once, sorely wounded, she was observed to "hop" from lair to lair, quaffing healing potions at each until she was strong enough to resume her business: spying on those who'd harmed her, and plotting their imminent doom, which she subsequently brought about. Rockfall traps (employing delicately-balanced and wedged boulders that will crush someone approaching a potion cache from the easiest or obvious

direction, but which do nothing if someone gets at the potions by another way—usually a way that involves some climbing or crawling) feature in some of these hideaways, but in general the Drow Dragon's lairs are simple shelters, not fortresses studded with spells or other perils and manned by servitor creatures.

Nurvureem uses ruined Rundreth Manor purely as a place to which to lure young human male adventurers, maintaining a hidden cache of wine, clothing, and food there, but little more. If she suspects a man is going to betray her straightaway by summoning adventurers or Waterdhavian patrols to attack her,



she often gives him a gift she keeps hidden somewhere in the ruins: the enchanted sword *Blazhserblane* (a long sword +1 that dates to the time of the Fallen Kingdom; it can glow with *faerie fire* when grasped and commanded, can *jump* with its wielder once a day, and bears a permanent tracer spell linked with a gem that Nurvureem possesses, allowing her to follow the movements and know the approximate whereabouts of anyone bearing it—and clearly hear all words they speak, regardless of distance or intervening magical effects).

### Nurvureem's Domain

Nurvureem knows every ravine and nameless creek from Triboar to Calling Horns. Her roamings take her along the verges of the High Forest to Secomber, thence along the edge of the High Moor and the Misty Forest to the Way Inn, and back northward through Daggerford to skirt Waterdeep and Goldenfields, taking in all else to the edges of the Kryptgarden Forest, and thence to Triboar once more. This is more a “stomping ground” than a patrolled and defended domain.

Velsaert of Baldur's Gate calls her “That deadliest of dragons—the sort who evades battle and all the other outward show of draconic life, to lie low when other wyrms roam or seek to do battle . . . only to rise up when unexpected and strike out of the shadows like a merciless snake.” Rotting dragonflesh is Nurvureem's favorite food, and she gets it by slaying adventurer- or weather-weakened dragons and plundering their hoards for all the magic she can find, use, or trade, before dining on her prey. Nurvureem has slain all the dragons to whom she's known to have revealed her true nature. Her victims include: Oskalymm the Old, a black dragon who once laired somewhere in the northern High Moor; Andrathanach, a young green dragon who was trying to establish a lair on the western border of the High Forest south of Noanar's Hold; and Surpuryte, daughter-of-liurrendeem, a silver dragon who dwelt in Amphail more or less permanently in human form.

### The Deeds of Nurvureem

Nurvureem has been alone and wandering the Sword Coast North for at least seven decades. She seems to like drow form, scouting lands by night, lazing in caves or swimming holes by day—and hunting in dragon form at twilight when she's found prey to her liking, or assuming dragon form whenever she encounters trouble. The Drow Dragon often sports with prey, chasing and toying with them for some time before slaying. Dead victims are often transported to rocky heights to become properly ripe for her liking—places she can watch from adjacent rock pinnacles, swooping down to kill carrion-eaters drawn to the remains.

After dragons (and their kin, wyverns), humans are the favorite prey of the Drow Dragon. Magic-wielding humans are of the most value to her because of their knowledge and the items they might carry—but their flesh tastes no better than that of humans who know spells only through folktales.

Nurvureem hates other drow and is both fascinated by and fearful of other sorts of elves. Elves who treat her with arrogance never fail to enrage her, but Nurvureem has tasted too many

traps to let her feelings goad her into instant attack before she's examined her surroundings and considered the situation. Most plots to slay or capture her amuse her more than anything else, and she seems to view the strivings of adventurers as personal entertainments provided for her by Faerûn. She often spies on adventuring bands she sights in the wilderlands, seeking only to enjoy “the show” (and dining on whatever they slay, once it's suitably rotten).

Nurvureem can be alarmed—into seething anger—if she discovers plots against her involving other dragons. She despises dracoliches and the Cult of the Dragon. She destroys Cult members and bone dragons alike when they cross her path, though she doesn't bother pursuing them.

Nurvureem uses the men who leave Rundreth Manor devoted to her to bring her back magical items, potions, and spell scrolls—and to keep her informed of adventurers and Cult agents active in her domain. Occasionally she'll visit one of her “Faithful Few” unannounced, appearing across their fire at night, or in



their bedchamber at an inn or home. She doesn't do this just when she wants something or to check up on them—often she desires a little companionship more than anything else, and to catch up on news. One of her men was trembling with fear as he revealed his recent marriage and baby child, only to have her glowingly congratulate him and go fetch some treasure as a gift for the babe. On several occasions she's helped her Faithful by "standing in" as a wife or escort.

### Nurvureem's Magic

The Drow Dragon commands only a few wizard spells but has acquired a useful collection of wands and other battleworthy magical items—including a ring that can teleport her away from real peril, another ring that can create many illusions, and plentiful magical healing. Two spells she's known to use follow.

#### Shadowgloom

(Evocation)

Level: 1

Range: 40 yards + 10 yards/level

Components: V

Duration: 2 rounds

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

This spell can be cast in one of two forms. Its most popular usage creates a writhing, swirling, irregular cloud of translucent gloom whose thickness and darkness continually vary. The cloud can be no larger in total volume or extent than a 20'-diameter sphere, is stationary, and can affect vision (and therefore aimed or missile attacks, which suffer a -2 penalty to hit) into it. Specifically, things within a *shadowgloom* are affected as follows for all creatures except the caster: the features of any one creature can be disguised, the nature of any one small hand-held object (such as a key) concealed, and the outlines of any single marking (arrow, sign, inscription, or heraldic device) obscured. This spell is often used to protect its caster against archery, or to conceal precisely where a secret entrance is located and how it is accessed.

Alternatively, a *shadowgloom* spell can be used to create a shadow of a particular shape (such as bat-winged, human, or of any object the size of a troll or smaller), that rushes away from the caster in a particular direction. The moving shadow can be made to turn or change direction once (for example, to pass through a doorway), but otherwise merely charges onward to the limits of spell range, where it fades away. This spell effect is commonly used to deceive foes into thinking a message, concealed creature, or spell effect is fleeing, or some sort of attack is being launched at them. It can, of course, by prearrangement with an observing creature, be used to convey specific meaning by its mere appearance, and by its specific shape.

Either form of *shadowgloom* is halted by solid barriers but slips past all obstacles around or through which there is an opening.

#### Threesteel

(Alteration)

Level: 3

Range: 30 yards

Components: V

Duration: 1 round

Casting Time: 1

Area of Effect: Special

Saving Throw: None

This spell affects any one iron or steel edged weapon within range that the caster has touched at some time in the past, causing it to split into three identical versions of itself that instantly leap through the air in stabbing attacks! The spell consumes the original weapon, and the three "shards" fly at MV 18 to simultaneously strike at THAC0 4, once each, dealing 1d4 + 4 hp damage, and then fade away. (They dissipate instantly if they miss or pass beyond spell range.)

All three shards can strike at one target, or two can strike one target and the third strike a second target, or all three can seek separate targets. They are considered +4 magical weapons for the purposes of determining what they can hit. If directed against non-living targets (such as a lock), each shard attack forces a saving throw vs. crushing blow.

The source of the shards can be a weapon of any size or condition, so long as it is of ferrous metal and three-quarters or more intact (in other words, a sword crumbling to rust but not yet broken will serve, as will a miniature bodice-dagger, a full-sized halberd, or a sword that has its tip broken off).

### Nurvureem's Fate

The Drow Dragon is heading for a confrontation with massed adventuring bands, whether she knows it or not. Several adventurers who've escaped her clutches at Rundreth Manor have continued to work for Nurvureem but have told adventuring companions about her. There seems to be a general mood among rulers and adventurers in the Sword Coast North that Faerûn would be better off without her, and that it's fast becoming time to strike Nurvureem down regardless of the price in blood she might exact. The warrior Angrathos "Swordshatterer" of Neverwinter even tried to enlist the assistance of Claugiyliamatar, an ambitious green dragon (detailed in *DRAGON Magazine* #233) in a hunt to corner and destroy the Drow Dragon, but the Dragon of Kryptgarden Forest refused.

Word of a connection between the Dark Lady of Rundreth Manor and the "drow who can turn into a dragon" is spreading fast thanks to several minstrels, but this is a recent notion, not generally-agreed-upon fact (even among Harpers and those learned or at least interested in the affairs of dragons).

A noose seems to be slowly tightening around Nurvureem. She seems almost to savagely welcome it, though whether she's seeking release through her own death or just a glorious fight remains a mystery . . . perhaps even in the clouded mind of the Dark Lady herself.



*Ed Greenwood admits that he has a beard and a smart mouth, and works in a library. Hmm; he doesn't seem all that different from Elminster after all.*



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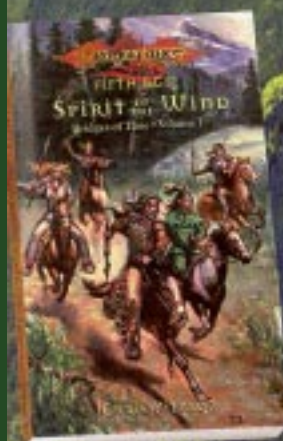


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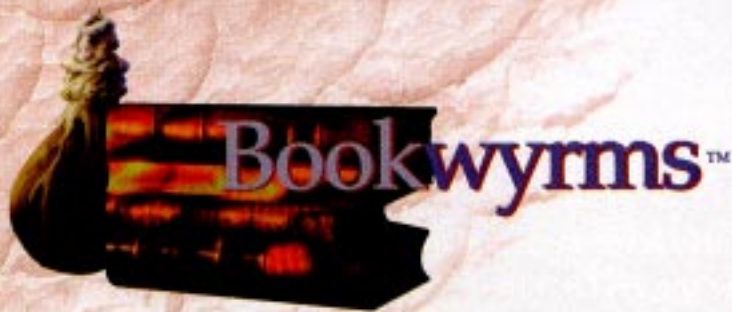
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## Giant Bones

Peter S. Beagle

ROC

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*Giant Bones* is a collection of six wonderful stories set in the world of Beagle's novel *The Innkeeper's Song*. However, one need not have read the novel to enjoy the stories.

Only one story, "Lal and Soukyan," has a direct connection to *The Innkeeper's Song*, and it chronicles what is probably the last adventure shared by two people who have drifted uneasily, if tenderly, into and out of each others' lives. It is also the only story that is not told by one character to another.

"The Last Song of Sirit Bayar" is told by a woman who traveled with the famous singer, Sirit Bayar, to a scribe. With rather earthy language, she snorts at the legends that have grown up after the singer's death, but the story she tells is no less wonderful, although it is much sadder.

"The Magician of Karakosk" is told to a group of people who have been exchanging stories. It is about Lanak, a magician who is too talented for his own good. Inevitably, he attracts the attention of a queen who is determined to learn his secrets. The end of this one is predictable, but that does not matter. What makes it work is Beagle's attention to details of characterization. Lanak, unlike most magicians, is a happily married man, and the queen is ruthless but not stupid. Indeed, to Lanak's shame, he finds himself enjoying the queen's company even as he shudders to think what she will do with his knowledge.

"The Tragical Historie of the Jiril's Players" is my favorite story, and it would make an interesting premise for a game session. Dardis, the manager of the company of actors that used to play for the Jiril, speaks to a fellow manager. He tells the woeful tale of his company's revival of a historical tragedy, a tale that nevertheless had me

shaking with laughter as one after another of the Jiril's heirs came to Dardis with "suggestions" for "improving" the play.

"Choushi-wai's Story" is told by the title character who was Lal's apprentice in "Lal and Soukyan." Choushi-wai tells about a young peasant who wins the heart of a king but does not wish to marry him, and of a thief who is so good at his trade that he is called simply "the Thief," as though there were never another," and a talking fish.

The narrator of "Giant Bones" is a grouchy father who tells his son about an ancestor who was forced to sojourn with a group of giants for a long time. He learns their ways, and realizes, with sorrow, that the giants are slowly dying out.

The connections between the stories are understated. Keep a sharp eye out for references to countries, characters, and animals if you want to get a picture of the world of *Giant Bones*. This is a world that will haunt readers long after they have put the book down.

## The Gratitude of Kings

Marion Zimmer Bradley

ROC

\$14.95 (HC)

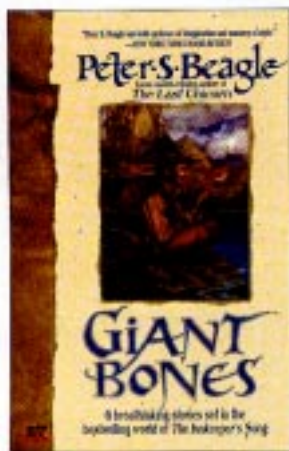
This is a short tale of Lythande, a mage whose power depends on no man learning that she is a woman. This character first appeared in the *Thieves' World* novels but quickly outgrew them. Lythande has appeared in many stories, some better than others. This is one of the better ones.

Lythande is returning to the court of a friend who is now a king. He is due to be married shortly, but something is odd about Princess

Velvet, his fiance. Worse yet, Lythande is expected to fight a magical duel with Lady Mirwen, Velvet's chaperone, who is convinced that no man is truly capable of magic. As if that weren't

complicated enough, a shapeshifting dragon drops in for the wedding. The dragon knows Lythande's secret. Will she reveal it?

Lythande tries to protect her secret and learn the truth about the King's fiancée with the help of a friendly candlemaker and her salamanders. When the candlemaker turns out to have her own magic, Lythande's juggling act becomes easier.



This is a world that will haunt the readers long after they have put the book down.



**The Gratitude of Kings is not a complex tale or a long one, but it is a good read.**



The resolution is unexpected, avoiding a clichéd or overly neat ending. Although Lady Mirwen receives a long overdue comeuppance, her magic leaves Velvet with an unexpected and unwanted legacy. The *Gratitude of Kings* is not a complex tale or a long one, but it is a good read.

## The Gift

Patrick O'Leary

Tor \$22.95 (HC)

*The Gift* is a tale within a tale. The frame story starts with a ship dredging up the body of a woman from the sea. The body is returned to the sea, by the captain's orders, and a previously silent Teller traveling on the ship finally tells a story that will leave the reader as spellbound as the crew.

The Teller's story is about the Usher of Night, a man who hungered for power; Simon, a king; and Tim, a carpenter's son. It is also about Mother Death and the mysterious Watermen. It is also, clearly, a story that has some special significance to both the Teller and the captain of the ship.

The Usher arrives in Simon's realm to cure the king of deafness. A casual demonstration of his power to the young king leaves Tim an orphan, while the result of the Usher's cure is that Simon can now hear too much, for he is unable to shut out the thoughts of others. Simon sets out to learn magic so that he can take vengeance on the Usher, while Tim finds shelter with the Watermen. Tim learns that he has the power to ride the winds, and the heart-breaking task of putting them to sleep forever because the Usher has corrupted them. Inevitably, Tim and Simon join forces against the Usher, but their meeting, while long anticipated, is surprising and not at all clichéd.

As the Teller spins his tale, the reader gradually learns who he is, and who the captain is. The reader also learns who the drowned woman is and how she came to die. All loose ends are wrapped up, perhaps a little too neatly, but ultimately satisfactorily.

*The Gift* is a beautiful examination of the nature of stories and storytelling. It is also an examination of the nature of magic, particularly the magic of storytelling. Don't miss this one.

## The Stars Dispose

Michaela Roessner

Tor

\$6.99 (PB)

There are books that one reads when one wants a swashbuckling tale full of breakneck action, duels, and dastardly deeds. Then there are books that one reads when one wants a good read, and it doesn't matter how much happens as long as one enjoys the book.

*The Stars Dispose* is in the latter category, and it is unfortunate that the cover implies otherwise. Despite the two gentlemen crossing what are meant to be swords or daggers, there is not a single physical duel in the novel. Set in Renaissance Florence, the book has a plague and a siege, but these events are the results of far more subtle machinations of wizards, whether aristocratic astrologers or humble cooks. Roessner does a good job evoking the period and demonstrating the connections between the world of the main characters and the worlds of magical beings. For example, the careful placement of lucky stones influences the relationships between members of a family. When the forces of evil strike, the stones move into new, unfavorable positions. This, in turn, results in a father's sudden, stubborn, but understandable decision to move three members of his family out of plague-ridden Florence.

Although he does this with the best intentions, the results are disastrous.

Roessner does not reveal much of the magical worlds, nor does she directly show her villains, whose goals remain somewhat mysterious. The final confrontation is with their unwitting pawns,

who are no match for the heroes' cleverness. These problems cause the book's second half to be weaker than the first.

Nevertheless, Roessner avoids falling into the all-too-common traps of tidying up history or lumping her characters into the traditional role-playing classes of fighter, mage, and priest, with no consideration of who feeds all of these people. Indeed, many of her characters are the cooks who do the feeding, and her aristocrats are not far removed from the people they rule. This is true in more than one sense, for many of the cooks are the illegitimate offspring of their masters, or the descendants of such offspring.



*The Gift* is a beautiful examination of the nature of stories and storytelling



Nor does the author ignore or apologize for the less savory facts of Renaissance life. The young cook Tomasso nobly resists the urge to force his attentions on a helpless slave woman, but he knows that sooner or later, someone will do so. The Signoria who rule Florence are quite prepared to send an eleven-year-old girl to a brothel to protect their political position.

There is an added bonus for those whose mouths water at Roessner's descriptions of feasts: At the end of the book, she includes recipes for a few of the dishes she described. There is also a food glossary, although it is most useful to those who already have some expertise in the culinary arts, and a list of references for those who want to gain such expertise.

## Trader

Charles de Lint

Tor

\$6.99

Hollywood loves making movies about body switching. This premise almost allows the script to write itself, and actors get the chance to demonstrate their range. Can the theme work as well outside of the visual media? Yes, it can, when handled as well as De Lint does in *Trader*.

Like most of De Lint's novels, *Trader* is set in contemporary Canada. Max Trader, a respectable guitar maker, finds himself in the body of Johnny Devlin, an irresponsible jerk with no money or job. Trader wants his body back, but Devlin has no intention of obliging him.

De Lint is deliberately unclear about precisely why the switch happened. One character strongly suggested that Trader was as dissatisfied with his life as Devlin, but there seems to be a hint that Devlin actively sought the change. There is an Inuit statue in his apartment that seems out of character for him to possess. Perhaps that is what Devlin bought with the \$300 he borrowed just before he switched bodies—certainly he did not

spend it on his rent, for Trader-in-Devlin's-body finds himself summarily evicted.

Regardless, what makes the story work is the refreshing intelligence of the characters. Trader soon has about half a dozen people believing his story; not to believe it would make them idiots. But what can they do about it? Could a few weird artists convince the police that this was anything but a prank? Almost certainly not, nor could Trader's teenage friend Nia, especially when she suspects that Lisa, her mother, has also been "taken over by aliens" after she sees Lisa kissing another woman.

There are a couple of scenes that do not ring quite true, such as the scene in which Lisa and Julie, her estranged lover, literally bump into each other on the street, or the one where Julie gets stabbed. The latter scene should work—Lisa and Julie are in a dangerous neighborhood where such things happen—but it feels too contrived. Also, the novel seems based on the assumption that the only worthwhile people are artists. It is unlikely that De Lint believes this, and one of his characters assures another that the audience is as important as the artist. De Lint does not show this to be true, and the woman discovers that she is an artist after all.

Despite this, the ultimate resolution of *Trader's* plight is handled well. De Lint often has a problem ending his novels, but *Trader* ends on the right note. This book is well worth reading by all fans of urban fantasy.



*Lisa Padol has been reading fantasy all her life, so she made sure to do her dissertation on modern Arthurian literature, which forced her to buy lots of books about King Arthur, as well as a few others that just insisted on coming along for the ride.*

By Harry Dolan





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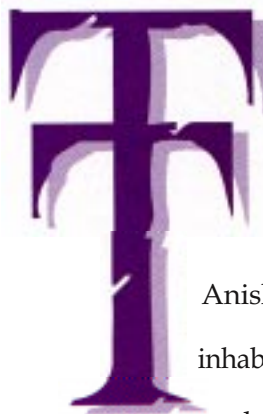


# The Waterborn

From the pages of  
*The Waterborn*  
and *Black God*  
emerge three  
new legends of  
fantasy fiction.

by  
J. Gregory Keyes

illustrated by  
Dan Burr



THE WORLD OF THE WATERBORN is one in which Human

Beings rub shoulders with gods on an almost daily basis.

These gods can be divided roughly into three classes—

Anishu, Aniru, and Mountain Gods. The Anishu are spirits that inhabit things—an oak tree, a stream, a stone. The Aniru are gods of places—forests, marshes, groves.

Humans encounter these “little” gods often, negotiate with them, strike bargains, fight with or make love with them. The third class—the Gods of the Mountain—are more remote. These include—among others—Balati the Forest Lord, Karak the Raven-god, and the Huntress. They are rarely sung about, rarely met, and have little to do with human affairs.

The River—also known as the Changeling—is a singular exception. A renegade Mountain God, the River is voracious, and where his power extends no other gods can exist. The River is worshiped, revered, and feared.

## The City of Nhol and the Waterborn

Originally, the Changeling was limited to the area near his banks, but more than a thousand years ago, he enticed a small tribe of Human Beings to settle near him, offering them shelter from the great desert. These people became his chosen, and the Changeling got children by the daughters of their chiefs. From these matings came the Waterborn, the ruling lineage of the tribe.

Over time, the tribe grew and built the city of Nhol, and then the Empire of Nhol, and where the people of the River

spread, so spread His influence and puissance. Wielding his powers, the Waterborn rooted out and destroyed the Anishu and Aniru. Within the empire, there is only one god: the River.

The Lords of Nhol have a terrible secret. The blood of the River gives some great power, but in others manifests in dark, terrible ways. The power usually expresses itself around puberty, and until that time royal children are kept isolated from the rest of the family Nhol was all but destroyed at least once by a Waterborn child who was not watched closely enough.

## The Cattle Folk

The Cattle Folk live in mountain valleys more than a thousand miles from Nhol, near the headwaters of the Changeling. There, the gods of the land are alive and well, the Changeling weak and confined to his course.

The chief concern of the Cattle Folk, naturally enough, is pasture. To obtain it, they strike bargains with the gods of the forest. Most often this involves an agreement to build a shrine to honor these small gods with sacrifices of *woti* (a kind of grain wine), incense, and fat. In the



early days, when the Cattle people first settled the mountains, there were matings between the gods and Human Beings, so that Cattle Folk kinship with the land is more than metaphorical. Most old families can number at least one god in their lineage.

## The Mang

Horse tribesmen, the many clans of the Mang occupy the vast plains between the Cattle Folk and the city of Nhol. The Mang are descended from Nagemaa, the Horse mother, as are their horses. They reckon their horses as kin, therefore, and treat them accordingly. The Mang hunt the beasts of the plains for their food, including giant aurochs and the hairy elephants they call nunetuk. Mang live much of their lives in the saddle, though most have villages they stay in for at least part of the year. The Mang confederacy is made up of many smaller tribes, which cooperate only occasionally, usually for ceremonies and in times of war.

Young men gain honor and prestige by conducting raids against traditional Mang Enemies—the Cattle People in the west, the Stone Leggings and Giants in the east and north, the Sherirut chiefdoms south. They trade skins, slaves, and ivory to Nhol for bright cloths, metal tools, weapons, and candy.

Like the Cattle Folk, the Mang maintain relationships with the spirits of the land and with personal totems. Mang shamans have the ability to allow their spirit helpers to live inside of their “Mansions of Bone,” an otherworld space within their chests from which they can draw on the power of these spirits.

They call the greater spirit world—the otherworld where gods live when not clothed in flesh—“The Lake.” Special drums are used to send ripples through the “Water.” The most powerful shamans can send their own spirits beneath the surface of the Lake to confront the gods in their own domain.

## Magic in the World of the Waterborn: Shamanism

The “Lake” has no exact parallel in the AD&D® universe. It is the spirit behind the substance of the Prime Material

Plane, where the master types of animals and natural forces dwell without flesh. Shamans draw power from this world to gain four innate abilities.

1. Shamans can see gods, even those manifested in flesh.

2. They can “enter” the Lake, a process akin to astral travel. They travel through the otherworld, leaving their physical bodies behind. If a shaman is gone from his body for too long (5–30 days), the body dies; if his spirit-body is killed in the otherworld, his corporeal form dies as well. Shamans have little power in the Otherworld unless aided by spirits. Shamans can also see through the eyes of their spirit helpers when they go abroad.

3. Shamans can communicate with the spirits and strike bargains with them.

4. Very powerful shamans (like Hezhi) can compel spirits to do their will. The chief drawback to this is that powerful spirits can attempt to possess the shaman’s body in turn.

The ability to control unwilling spirits varies greatly with the shaman. The base chance to do so is Intelligence + Wisdom + level. The combined Intelligence, Wisdom, and hit dice of the spirit are then subtracted from this. Whether the shaman fails or succeeds, the spirit may make the same attempt to control him.

Example: A shaman attempts to control Yush, a wolf spirit, whose combined Intelligence, Wisdom, and hit dice total 30. The shaman adds his 14 intelligence, 13 wisdom, and 10 levels for a total of 37, and subtracts this from the wolf-spirit’s total, giving him a 7% chance to compel the spirit. If he tries and fails, he may try again each week thereafter. As should be clear, only very powerful shamans have much of a chance of actually compelling service from spirits, and most do not attempt to do so, preferring to strike bargains instead.

All of a shaman’s other powers are derived from the spirits themselves. Spirits can lend attributes—an eagle spirit can lend its eyesight, an Auroch spirit its great strength, a stone spirit its hardness. These may manifest physically, as Strength, Dexterity, Constitution, AC, or hit points—The Auroch’s spirit, for instance, might imbue the shaman with its 20 Strength, for a short



time. If the spirit has spell-like powers, the shaman can use those too.

Other options for handling magic in the world of the Waterborn include using the AD&D Shaman supplement or giving shamans various spirit servants with innate spell-like abilities they may call on, much as a priest would.

*Forced to flee Georgia after several unfortunate blowgunning incidents, Greg Keyes now writes, eats, drinks, fences, and occasionally sleeps in Seattle, Washington.*

# Perkar Kar Barku

## 4TH-LEVEL WARRIOR

STRENGTH:	12
DEXTERITY:	14
CONSTITUTION:	13
INTELLIGENCE:	11
WISDOM:	8
CHARISMA:	16
AC:	5 (chainmail)
HIT POINTS:	15 (see "Magical Items," below)
ALIGNMENT:	NG
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil (see below)
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil (see below)
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (5' 7")

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Long sword, short sword, spear.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Agriculture (11), animal handling (7), etiquette (16), riding—land-based (11), heraldry (11), fire building (7), hunting (7), survival—plains (11).

**Appearance:** Perkar is about 18 years old during his adventures. Slimly built, he has gray eyes and chestnut hair.

**Background:** Like all young men of the Cattle Folk, Perkar sought *piraku*. This word means many things: wealth in land and cattle, honor, glory, and right behavior. Most men Perkar's age gain cattle and land through good marriages, since a wealthy father dowers his daughter well. Perkar, however, had the poor judgment to fall in love with the goddess of a stream and could not imagine marriage to a mortal woman, so he had to seek *piraku* in more dangerous ways. To complicate matters, he learned that his love, the Stream Goddess, was eternally "devoured" by the Changeling, the river into which she flows. Perkar boldly swore to free her from the Changeling's cruelty.

Perkar joined an expedition led by the king of his folk to negotiate with Balati, the Forest Lord—chief of the Mountain Gods—for more pasture land. On this expedition, however, he discovered that the Forest Lord keeps weapons that could slay the river god. Seeking these weapons, Perkar angered the Forest Lord. Not only did the negotiations for more pasture fail, but his king—and all of the expedition besides Perkar and the half-man Ngangata—were slain when the Forest Lord unleashed the Huntress to punish them.

Perkar himself would have been slain but for the fact that he had stolen *Harka*. Now, more than ever, his greatest wish is to destroy the Changeling—and anything dear to the Changeling—and to set things right.

**Magical Items:** *Harka* is a godsword, a minor god bound in the form of a long sword. *Harka* is highly intelligent (Int 20, Ego 15) and communicates with his bearer telepathically. *Harka* offers condescending advice, since he has seen heroes come and go for ages, and his opinion of them has not improved.



*Harka* acts as a +6 weapon for purposes of what he can hit but has no actual bonus to hit. However, anyone wielding *Harka* fights as a 15th-level fighter. *Harka* is almost indestructible and shatters non-magical blades on a roll of natural 18–20.

*Harka* confers infravision on his bearer and can *neutralize poison* by touch three times daily. It can regenerate 11–20 (1d10 + 10) hp/round for a maximum of a 160 hp/day. He does so even if his bearer falls below 0 hit points. *Harka* senses danger to his bearer more-or-less infallibly. He also allows his bearer to see the "heartstrings" of his opponent, which translates to knowledge of an opponent's level, AC, and remaining hit points.

*Harka* bonds with the life-force of his bearer and cannot be transferred to a new bearer until the death of the old one. Thus, a sufficiently powerful foe could slay both *Harka's* bearer and *Harka* himself. For this reason, *Harka* councils against fighting opponents too strong for him. *Harka's* greatest wish is to be freed from his imprisonment as a blade, but he does not know how that might be done.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Perkar tends to be earnest and serious, as if he carries the weight of the world on his shoulders. He always tries to do the right thing—unfortunately, his judgment regarding this is often faulty.



## 11TH-LEVEL SHAMAN

STRENGTH:	4
DEXTERITY:	11
CONSTITUTION:	13
INTELLIGENCE:	18
WISDOM:	16
CHARISMA:	16
AC:	10
HIT POINTS:	5
ALIGNMENT:	CG
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Spells
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Spells
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	M (5')

**Weapon Proficiencies:** None.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Etiquette (16), languages—ancient (18), languages—modern (18), ancient history (17), reading/writing (19), religion (16), spellcraft (16), riding—land based (19).

**Appearance:** Hezhi is about 13 during her adventures. Her face is heart shaped, her eyes and hair very black, her complexion dusky brown.

**Spellcasting:** Hezhi should be treated as a shaman. If using the rules previously described, her base chance is multiplied by 2 due to her innate Waterborn power.

**Background:** Hezhi is the youngest daughter of the emperor of Nhol. Raised by her nurse, Qey, and her half-giant bodyguard Tsem, she spent her childhood amongst the remote, crumbling parts of the palace. Her best friend was her cousin D'en, a boy just a few years older than herself. When Den vanished one day, she became obsessed with finding him. She discovered that at the age of eleven or twelve, her kinsmen either underwent the rite of accession and moved into the part of the palace inhabited by the royal family—or vanished forever, taken beneath the dread and mysterious Darkness Stair. Such was Den's fate, though no one would tell her why.

When her attempts to reach the base of the Darkness Stair by exploring the catacombs below the palace failed, she turned to the royal library for clues to her own impending fate. She found those clues, and much more, including a love for books and knowledge, fear and respect for the unhelpful librarian Ghan, and the first stirrings of romance for a young architect named Yen. At the same time, her power began to manifest itself, making her race to understand her double-bladed heritage all the more desperate. When she learned at last what lies below the Darkness Stair—and that her own fate was carrying her inevitably there—she understood that her only path was to escape Nhol and everything she had ever known, to leave the influence of her ancestor, the River. Due to a capriciously made



wish and her awakening powers, fate bent itself to help her, bringing Perkar and his godsword from his distant home.

Once free of the River, her transformation subsided. In the world beyond the River, however, Hezhi discovered that her trials were far from over. Even latent, her River blood made her different and powerful, and she found she must choose between madness and becoming a shaman—though the difference between these two was far from clear to her.

With the help of Brother Horse—an old shaman of the Mang people—Hezhi learned to deal with the gods of the land, to invite them to live within her “Mansion of Bone.” Most of the spirits who serve Hezhi do so because they wish to, but Hezhi's ability is great enough to compel all but the most powerful gods to do her bidding. Unfortunately, it is just those most powerful gods—Karak the Raven, The Huntress, and of course the Changeling himself—who take the greatest interest in her.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Hezhi is by turns serious, mischievous, thoughtful and imperious. She loves Tsem and her nurse Qey fiercely but often takes them for granted. Her trust and love are hard won, and indeed, deep down, she feels that she can only trust herself. She is a bit resentful of a universe which continues to impose powers and duties upon her she never asked for, but in the end always accepts her burdens.

## 2nd-LEVEL FIGHTER

STRENGTH:	19
DEXTERITY:	9
CONSTITUTION:	18
INTELLIGENCE:	10
WISDOM:	15
CHARISMA:	8
AC:	8
HIT POINTS:	25
ALIGNMENT:	LG
SPECIAL ATTACKS:	Nil
SPECIAL DEFENSES:	Nil
MAGIC RESISTANCE:	Nil
SIZE:	L (8')

**Weapon Proficiencies:** Club.

**Nonweapon Proficiencies:** Etiquette (8), dancing (9), reading/writing (11).

**Appearance:** Tsem is the half-giant bodyguard of Hezhi. He has massively broad shoulders, a barrel chest, and arms about the same length as his legs. He has a massive jaw but not much of a chin, heavy brows, and teeth like large dice.

**Background:** Traditionally the Emperor of Nhol is served by a small body guard of giants. The giants live in the thick cane forests and mountains north of Nhol and east of the River and in their home country are almost invincible, commanding strange, poorly understood magics.

Giants, however, are fiercely territorial: a single male lives in a very large region with any number of females and children. Since desirable territory is limited, young males who are unable to defeat an older one are cast out, left to make their way in human lands. Many of these become mercenaries or slaves, and it is giants of this sort who typically serve at the emperor's court. What is very rare indeed outside of the giant country is a female giant— in fact, no she-giant had ever been a member of the emperor's bodyguard until Tsem's mother arrived one day on a barge from Wun. She never explained why she came— not to anyone at court, not even to her son. The emperor was delighted, however, and after a few years conceived a passing fancy to breed her to one of his human servants in hopes of producing a more intelligent giant.

Afterward, he thought better of this. Enormously strong slaves are one thing. Enormously strong slaves who are also smart are another thing altogether. Tsem was brighter than the full-blooded giants and might have been disposed of, except that he was smart enough to play dumb. Assuming his experiment had failed, the Emperor kept Tsem around for a time as a curiosity, and, when he tired of him, gave Tsem the task of safeguarding his youngest daughter, Hezhi. In preparation for his task, Tsem was taught some unarmed combat but not allowed to study or possess weapons.



After fleeing Nhol with Hezhi and Perkar, Tsem learned how to use a club and shield, to devastating effect.

**Roleplaying Notes:** Tsem has led a lonely life. He barely knew his mother, who died young of a fever. Though he never lacked for bedmates among the jaded and curious women of the palace, he has never been offered real love or intimacy save by the little girl he was ordered to guard, and to a lesser extent by her nurse, Qey. In turn, Tsem loves Hezhi without reservation, and fights anyone or anything that threatens her. He is most often frustrated in his task as guardian by Hezhi herself, who sometimes purposefully escapes his watchful eye. Tsem is earthy, has a strong laugh, a doleful frown, and is very fond of tumbling serving-maids.





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# A Traveler's Emporium

It is often said  
that getting  
there is half  
the fun,  
but it is  
often more  
than twice  
the trouble.



REACHEROUS PATHS, HIGHWAY BANDITS, the harsh elements, shortages of food and drink, and bizarre social customs can make any trek beyond the PCs' home an uncomfortable or downright dangerous experience. If the main stage of an adventure is somewhere far away, the PCs could be getting into more than they bargained for simply by walking outside the city gates.

Here are some magical items that can be given to PCs to make them feel more at home away from home. Most are low in power, so DMs can give some to just about any level of character without throwing game balance out the window. Used sparingly, they give traveling more color and afford PCs a greater realization for the difficulties of traveling.

## Amulet of Warning

This well-wrought piece of jewelry is two and a half inches in diameter, usually hung on a silver chain, and radiates divination magic upon the casting of a *detect magic* spell. Its base metal is silver or gold, off set by a large amethyst in the center.

Tiny rubies surround the amethyst. When a creature with malicious intent toward the wearer comes within 50 feet, the amethyst glows softly with a purple radiance and pulses warmly. Only creatures with Intelligence scores above five can be so detected. Simply being evil is not sufficient; the wearer must be sought out in particular by the creature. Thus, while this is not effective against creatures of low or animal intelligence, it is a boon for detecting highway ambushes or pickpockets. The amulet detects magical

or enchanted creatures as well (including invisible, out of phase, and camouflaged creatures), but not undead creatures.

**XP Value:** 2,000 **GP Value:** 10,000

## Backpack, Traveler's

This item seems to be a simple, non-magical, leather backpack, but it is imbued with strengthening alteration and protective magic. The pack is completely flame-retardant and waterproof. When exposed to a nonmagical flame or water source (including ice, such as hail or snow) the magic drives back flames and forces droplets of water, ice, or snow away from the fabric. The backpack floats in water, and any creature weighing less than 250 lbs. may use the pack as a buoy. Heavier creatures sink, but the backpack and its contents remain dry even when underwater. The backpack is very durable and does not suffer normal wear and tear, but it can be damaged intentionally. The backpack grants all objects stored inside it a +2 bonus on saving throws vs. crushing blow, magical fire, lightning, and acid. The backpack itself has a +4 bonus for all such saving throws. Finally, the enchantment of the pack reduces the effective weight of the

by  
Jeffrey A. Mendoza

illustrated by  
Jim Crabtree



objects placed inside to ten percent of their normal weight. The magical protections and bonuses granted by the backpack are contingent on the pack being firmly closed and belted; opening or filling the backpack beyond capacity negates all protections until it is belted closed again.

XPValue: 500 GPValue: 2,500

### Bag of Cleanliness

If soiled linen or clothes are placed in this thick, cloth duffel with the drawstrings closed for four hours or more, the owner finds his clothes clean and fresh as if they had been completely washed, rinsed, and dried. Most normal stains can be removed in this manner including wine, blood, and grime, but not the blood of magical beasts or stains from magical elixirs. If the drawstrings are opened before the four-hour period is up, the owner finds his clothes unchanged from their previous state.

XPValue: 200 GPValue: 1,000

### Boots, Hiking

A *detect magic* spell reveals a strong aura of alteration magic upon these rugged leather boots. When the wearer treads on uneven ground or through terrain that would normally hinder or impede movement, the nature of the magical boots becomes apparent. The boots allow the wearer to walk or run his full movement rate over any type of terrain, whether the ground be mud, sand,

snow, or dirt. The wearer's feet do not sink any more than half an inch when treading through

these types of

terrain. The boots always remain clean and are fully waterproof. The wearer has a bonus of +1 to saving throws that involve dodging some obstacle (such as landslides, boulders, or fireballs) due to the sure-footedness granted by the hiking boots. The boots do not grant the ability to walk on water, tread across quicksand, or walk on clouds.

XPValue: 600 GPValue: 3,000

### Boots, Marching

These appear to be ordinary, hard-leather boots, but if a person wearing the boots walks for more than half an hour, the magic of the boots becomes active, and the wearer can walk 50% faster than his normal movement rate. In addition, the wearer may march 14 hours per day instead of the normal 10, without additional fatigue. A character with a base movement rate of 12 (unencumbered) could march 50 miles instead of 24 over level ground in one day

XPValue: 500 GPValue: 2,500

### Boots of Passage

When the wearer of these soft-leather walking boots moves through an area thick with vegetation, he might notice that he leaves no trail or any noticeable trace that he had passed through the area. The wearer does not break twigs, disturb plants, make footprints, or leave a scent. His trail radiates alteration magic for two turns after he passes. The enchantment on the boots grants no ability to pass through normally impassable obstacles such as a thick wall of thorns.

XPValue: 400 GPValue: 2,300

### Boots of Trail Marking

These boots are both a boon and a curse to the stumbling adventurer. The boots leave dull, luminescent, glowing footprints behind the wearer. The footprints are still visible if covered with up to two inches of dirt, but they fade if covered with more than that. The glow remains on all imprinted surfaces for four days. Leaving such a trail, one might never become lost, but anyone or anything *can* easily find you. A *dispel magic* cast on the prints destroys them and, if cast directly on the boots, disrupts

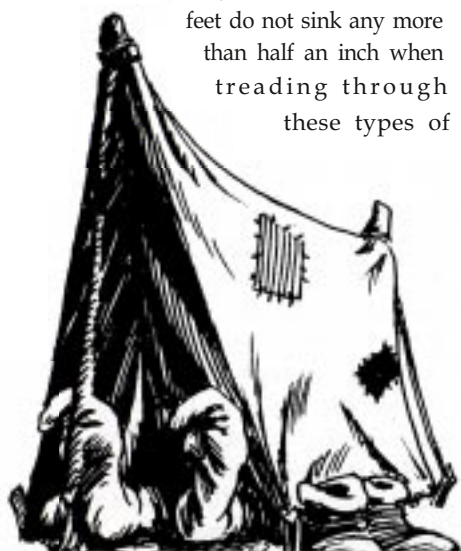


There is a cursed variation of these boots which, once donned, can never be removed without the aid of a remove curse spell. These types of boots are always the result of a failed attempt to make the beneficial pair.

XPValue: Nil GPValue: Nil

### Bottle of Holding

This stoppered flask is usually made of a light metal and radiates alteration magic. The exact nature of the magic is not apparent until an attempt is made to fill the flask with more than it can seemingly hold. The bottle is linked to an extra-dimensional pocket and can hold up to 50 gallons of liquid. Regardless of its contents, it weighs the same as a normal flask its size holding a normal amount of liquid. When the flask is poured or drunk from, the liquid has no extraordinary pressure, and the flask remains full until the last pint is drained. Usually there is no way of knowing exactly how much liquid the bottle still contains without draining all the contents or filling it to capacity. If the bottle is punctured, the extra-dimensional pocket is destroyed and the bottle explodes in a blast of water and vapor. Any creature within a 10' radius suffers 2d6 hp damage from





### Bow of Hunting

Any humanoid with the hunting non-weapon proficiency who uses this bow to hunt gains heightened senses of sight and smell that aid him while stalking prey. The bow grants a +4 bonus to hunting proficiency checks.

XPValue: 200 GPValue: 900

### Cane of Evasion

The *cane of evasion* always appears to be some sort of nondescript cane or walking stick, perhaps nothing more than a fallen tree branch. A *detect magic* spell reveals a powerful aura of summoning magic on the cane, but the workings of the magic are very subtle, and only a very observant person who takes the cane on outings in the wild can glimpse its enchantment. The cane's magic lies in the ability to steer creatures away from the owner while trekking through a particular terrain. When the owner travels through the specific type of terrain (marsh, swamp, forest, mountain, or some other wild territory), he is 75% less prone to have a random encounter (i.e., if a character is traveling with such a cane, the DM should reduce the chance of encounter per unit of time by three-fourths). This applies only to natural denizens of the area the owner is traveling through. If he is being sought out by a creature or person, the cane has no power over that individual.

XPValue: 1,500 GPValue: 7,000

### Cane of Fire Starting

This appears to be a very sturdy wooden cane or walking stick with a small, twelve-faceted ruby embedded into the top. Small pictures of fire or candlelight may be carved along the length of the cane. The cane radiates evocation magic.

This cane has the ability to ignite a small flame in any combustible material (even if the target material is damp, wet, or frozen). The owner has but to utter the command word when striking the desired surface with the top of the cane. The target, whatever its present condition, ignites. If the owner strikes a creature in combat while uttering the command word, the opponent suffers 1d6 hp fire damage (if a saving throw vs. spell is unsuccessful). If any flammable surfaces on the target's person fail their item saving throws, they burst into flames.

The cane itself cannot be damaged in any way by normal fire or heat and has a +8 bonus to its save vs. magical fire. When a flame is sparked on a damp or dry object or surface, the cane expends one charge. When a flame is produced on a wet or frozen surface, the cane expends two charges. In either case, all surfaces within two feet are instantly dried. Igniting fire on a living creature expends two charges. When created, *canes of fire starting* typically have 50 + 3d10 charges each.

XPValue: 400 GPValue: 2,200

### Cane of Foraging

*Canes of foraging* are wrapped tightly in strips of hide and pelts of small herbivores. The cane has two functions. The cane can be commanded to seek out the most nutritious edible plant food within two hundred feet. The cane gives preference to quality of the consumable over quantity, but within the limits of common sense. (The cane chooses an ample source of berries over one small nutritious root.) The cane can also be commanded to seek out the nearest source of water within one half of a mile. In both cases the cane tugs at the user's hand, leading him along at a quick pace until the location is reached. The cane can



detect edibles and sources of water up to three feet underground.

The cane requires the knowledge of a command word and expends one charge to locate food or a water source. If there is no edible food or water within range, the cane expends one charge and remains inert.

XPValue: 600 GPValue: 2,800

### Cape of Comfort

This cape is fashioned from a thick, durable, high-quality fabric and attaches at the neck with a normal iron brooch. When the cape is taken off and laid on the ground, it lengthens out to six and a half feet, expands, overlaps onto itself, and the fabric thickens to make a very luxurious sleeping bag. The fabric holds the softest down and is water resistant. No insect or arachnid will come within three feet of the cape while in sleeping bag form. Any humanoid who sleeps in the bag for eight hours, upon waking is healed two points of normal damage (not acid or fire-based damage, nor does it cure damage caused by magical afflictions such as mummy rot). When the bag is lifted from the ground, it reverts to its cape form. The cape in either form makes its item saving throws against normal fire with a +3 bonus and against magical fire with a +1 bonus.

XPValue: 400 GPValue: 1,600



## Chalk of Trail Marking

When this stick of chalk is used to draw a mark or design on a surface, the chalk leaves a colorful, iridescent streak or design that cannot be removed by washing or scraping. Only the person presently holding the chalk can see any marks made with it on surfaces, regardless of whether or not he actually used it to make that particular mark. The chalk can be used to leave marks on virtually any hard surface, and the marks remain for three weeks. The markings can be made visible to a magic user via a *detect magic* spell. The only means of removing the marks, short of destroying the surface, is by casting a *dispel magic* spell.

XPValue: 250 GPValue: 1,000

## Climbing Spikes

These spikes have been known to come in a broad range of forms, from plain iron spikes, to short rods inlaid with lines of gold or silver and imbedded with small gemstones. Regardless of their appearance, all spikes weigh only one half of an ounce. They are typically found in sets of ten or twenty. The alteration magic within the spikes allows the user to climb any steep surface with greater ease. Once the spike's end is struck to a solid surface, the spike imbeds itself into the surface, impressing no other stress or damage to the material other than a small hole used to hold the spike into place. The materials that the spike will pierce include hard wood, clay, adobe, stone (hard or soft), and metal. In this way, the spikes can be used to climb wooden, metal, or stone structures, mountain cliffs, or other types of solid sheer or inclined obstacles. A user may then simply extract the spike from the surface, using no extraneous effort to do so; the spike comes away from the surface very easily leaving a small, smooth hole. They may be used as makeshift weapons against creatures as stone, clay, or iron golems, and gargoyles, in which case they inflict 1d3 hp damage per attack. They can be wielded in melee as a dagger or dirk but cannot be thrown. XP and GP values are per spike.

XPValue: 30 GPValue: 120



## Cloak of Animal Kinship

These cloaks are made of the pelts or hides of the animals they are created to affect. Over the designated animal, the cloak has certain influences and grants the wearer specific benefits. Any such animal that the wearer encounters regards the wearer (and only the wearer, not his companions) as one of its own kind. If the animal would naturally be hostile to one of its own kind because of pack or group allegiances, the cloak shifts the hostile reaction to a neutral one. The cloak allows the wearer to understand the animal's language, if it has one, and the animal can understand the wearer. It must be made clear that animals do not have a vast vocabulary, and any conversation will be rudimentary at best. If the animal is favorably inclined, it might provide information or aid (within the limits of its Intelligence).

The wearer must be wary while wearing this cloak in the wild, however, for while it grants kinship with one type of animal, it may instill enmity with others. Any natural enemies of the animal the wearer has kinship with regard the wearer as a hated enemy and flee from or attack the wearer as per its natural disposition.

XPValue: 1,000 GPValue: 5,000

## Cloaks, Camouflage

These cloaks are fashioned from a very broad range of materials and are attuned to work in one specific environment only (tundra, forest, swamp, desert, tropics, plains, etc.). Each cloak grants the wearer the ability to become invisible in that specific terrain while the wearer is motionless. Creatures with keen smell or sight may be granted an automatic saving throw to detect the creature, and creatures who can see invisible objects and creatures can see the wearer immediately.

XPValue: 200 GPValue: 900

## Cloak, Good Weather

There are three variations of this cloak. All are of the highest quality and durability and radiate protection magic. The cloaks protect against only natural elements and have no effect whatsoever on spells or spell-like powers that induce heat or cold, or those making use of the elements, such as ice, fire, or sand. All cloaks keep the wearer at a comfortable 70 degrees Fahrenheit while the outside temperature is within the limits of cloak's effectiveness. For every degree outside the range of the cloak's effectiveness, the temperature relative to the wearer is offset by one degree. No more than 20 degrees can be offset in this fashion before the cloak ceases to function.

The *desert cloak* is always of a sandy gold color and made of leather or sewn of the hide(s) or skin of some desert animal such as a snake or giant lizard. The cloak keeps the wearer completely at ease in temperatures ranging from 90 to 150 degrees Fahrenheit. The wearer is completely protected and shielded from any sandstorm; the cloak radiates a field six inches around the wearer during such storms through which no grain of sand may pass. The wearer may still walk on sand normally, but no sand finds its way into his boots. During sandstorms, the wearer's movement is not impeded.

XPValue: 500 GPValue: 2,000

The *arctic cloak* is fashioned of the fur and hide or an arctic denizen, perhaps a

bear, winter wolf, or yeti. The cloak provides the wearer with a stable temperature of 70 degrees in an environmental temperature of 30 to 40 degrees Fahrenheit. In addition, the wearer is completely protected from the effects of snow and snowstorms (in much the same manner as the protection granted by the *desert cloak*). In the event of an avalanche or large snow ball, the cloak's power fails and the wearer is subject to the standard effects and damage.

XPValue: 500 GPValue: 2,000

The *cloak of comfort* is made of normal cloth or leather of excellent, if only nondescript, quality. The cloak keeps the wearer at a comfortable 70 degrees as long as the outside temperature is between 30 and 100 degrees. The wearer is shielded from all forms of rain, sleet, hail, and snow within this range of temperature.

XPValue: 400 GPValue: 2,000



## Hammer of Climbing

This adamantite-headed hammer is usually inlaid with small gems or golden glyphs. A much more powerful relative of the *climbing spikes*, the hammer actually imbeds any normal, unenchanted climbing spike into stone, metal, or wood in the same way as the *climbing*

*spikes*. The user does this with a minimum of effort, tapping the hammer's head to the spike onto the surface. The spikes stay imbedded in the surface until a creature succeeds in making an Open Doors check, or until another force, equivalent in strength, manages to dislodge the spike. The *hammer of climbing* can imbed 100 spikes each day. After this limit is reached, the enchantment grows dormant until the next sunrise.

XPValue: 1,500 GPValue: 4,500

## Helm of Infravision

This need not be a helm at all but can take the form of a hat, hood, or other head garment. The helm grants the wearer infravision to a distance of 100 feet but inhibits normal sight. (The user must remove the helm to resume normal sight.) While the helm is worn, the user's eyes glow with a dark light in the normal visual bands, but are very bright when viewed with infravision.

Creatures with infravision see the helm as luminescent only when it is worn by a person.

XPValue: 400 GPValue: 2,400

## Helm of Excellent Sight

This appears to be a normal helm or some type of head gear, but its magical nature becomes apparent once it is donned. The helm triples the creature's length of sight—its maximum sight as well as the length at which details can be discerned. The sharpened level of detail grants the wearer an automatic saving throw vs. spell to detect a naturally camouflaged creature if one is not readily given. If a saving throw is normally called for, it is made with a +3 bonus. The wearer also receives a bonus of +1 to surprise rolls and attempts to find secret or hidden doors. If the helm is worn for more than ten hours in a single day, the wearer begins to experience vertigo, and his vision becomes blurred (-2 on all attack rolls and ability checks). The vertigo ends within five rounds of removing the helm but returns if the wearer tries to use the helm before 24 hours have passed.

XPValue: 800 GPValue: 3,500

## Machete of Path Clearing

This hardy cutting instrument is of any design that makes forming paths through thick woods or jungles easier. The magic is apparent only when the owner holds the sword while facing an area ridden with vegetation. If the owner begins to hack at the vegetation, he notices that using his own strength to wield the blade is not necessary. The sword hacks a path through the thickest of jungles almost under its own volition; the owner need only hold and direct it. The time required to cut a path through virgin territory greatly depends on the terrain, so to find the time while using the machete, simply multiply the length of path the user is normally able to cut in a day by five. At the end of the day, the user has not expended any more energy or effort than if he had walked the same distance. In addition to cutting through thick vines, bushes, and light tree branches, the machete causes small plants the user steps on or over to wither away, creating a viable trail. Magical plants or plant-like creatures cannot be harmed in this way. The machete can only be used for three days in a row before it becomes inert for one week.

XPValue: 1,800 GPValue: 5,400

## Necklace of Language

When worn, this necklace begins to fill the mind of the wearer with the words, syntax, and idioms of a specific language. After the third day of wearing such a necklace, it allows the wearer to completely understand and articulate one additional language. The wearer can speak this language with great ability and with a vast amount of vocabulary. The dialect and idioms are particular to a specific region, and the wearer may not be able to understand a distant dialect. While speaking the additional language, the wearer can mimic accents he hears with great proficiency. The appearance and construction of the necklace is dependent upon the language ability it bestows. If the necklace empowers the wearer to speak an Elven language, the necklace's small golden beads might be engraved with or be in the shape of small oak or maple leaves or small trees. If a Dwarven language is granted, small iron



war hammers, anvils, or mountain figures would be between a few of the chain links of the necklace. If a woodland being's language (such as brownie or dryad) is granted, the necklace may be made of strung berries or acorns. *Necklaces of language* may be created to allow comprehension and speaking ability in any normal mode of verbal communication (e.g., Elven, Common, Dwarven, dragon tongues, but not languages heavily dependent upon body language nor telepathic communication). If the necklace is taken off for any reason, the wearer instantly loses memory of the language.

XPValue: 650 GPValue: 3,500



### Pipe of Aversion

This eight-inch-long pipe is very well crafted and carved with images of a woodland scenery along its length and head. When this pipe is smoked outdoors, a keen smoker notices that no bothersome insects approach closer than five feet. The smoke itself is not pungent or unusual, but it smells of whatever type of tobacco is used. Insects will not gather around the periphery of the magical field; they steer away or around it. Note that this only applies to nonmagical normal insects; giant-sized or magical insects are not affected by the pipe.

XPValue: 200 GPValue: 800

### Rod of Attraction

Along the entire length of this five foot rod are carvings of exotic fruits, trees, bushes, and vegetables. When the command word is uttered and the rod staked into the ground, the entire area is filled with the scent of luscious fruits, flowers, and other plant life (some pungent, some sweet). The scent attracts small, hungry herbivores likely to inhabit the terrain. Unless the rod is used in a city or area devoid of animal life, the rod attracts 1d4 small herbivores within three

turns. The aromas the magic produces are fairly specific to attract only herbivores, but there is always a 15% chance the rod attracts a larger omnivore and a 5% chance it attracts a larger carnivore; they know the area would be a good place to get food. (For omnivores or carnivores, roll on the appropriate random encounter table.) Usually, the rod insures a good meal in the wild but occasionally can prove more than a mouthful if it attracts something the PCs cannot handle. The rod ceases producing the aromas after two turns, and the scent usually clears the area one turn afterward. If a breeze is present, the aromas clear after three rounds. If a strong breeze is present, the effectiveness of the rod is halved (attracting only 1d2 small herbivores), and in stronger winds the rod is ineffective.

When created, *rods of attraction* are imbued with 30 charges.

XPValue: 750 GPValue: 3,600

### Rod of Direction

This 3'-long wooden rod is wrapped in a thick helix of iron spanning from top to bottom. Imbedded in the top of the cane is a one-inch diameter nugget of magnetite. The rod radiates an aura of priestly divination magic. When the owner of the rod speaks the name of the destination he would like to know the direction to and utters the appropriate



command word, a charge is expended and the rod will tug the owner's hand in the correct direction. The tugging persists for five rounds unless the user releases the rod prematurely. The rod can successfully specify the direction of any of the cardinal directions, familiar monuments, landmarks, cities, towns, villages, or the like. The rod cannot locate any place that is not well known to a great number of people or the user herself. It can locate any named city, ruins, or mystical place (if the location has been well visited), as well as places the user has visited before. The rod cannot tell the direction of undiscovered gold mines or caches of gems or treasure. If the owner commands the rod to "show me the direction to the nearest pile of gold," the rod remains inert and expends a charge. Note that sometimes the rod may be less than helpful if the direction to the location requested is through an impassable boundary such as across a canyon or through a sheer cliff. The rod can only give the most direct way to the specified place. The rod cannot detect nor direct its wielder toward offworld places or realms in other planes.

When created, *rods of direction* hold 50+1d20 charges.

XPValue: 1,000 GPValue: 5,000



### Siver's Sustaining Satchel

This item is a simple brown, hard-leather purse or sack for carrying small food items. If a *detect magic* spell is cast, it will reveal a strong aura of summoning magic. The satchel holds up to three-quarters of a cubic foot of items, but when a small food item is placed inside and left alone for one turn, the satchel triples the amount of that specific food, or increases it to the limits of the sack's volume capacity. Any sort of edible food may be augmented in this manner, but it does not augment poisons, living animals, nor uncooked body parts. The satchel may be used up to three times per day. Any food item generated radiates a faint aura of magic. Such food items cannot be used in the satchel to make more food. Once an original food item is used once in the sack, it may not be used again. Any item which is rotted, overripe, or moldy and placed inside the sack and left alone, disappears, and does not generate any additional food.

XPValue: 900 GPValue: 5,000

### Skillet of Frying

This small skillet or frying pan is about 10 inches in diameter and radiates alteration magic if so detected for. When something edible is placed onto the skillet, it cooks or fries the food until it is

removed. The outer plating of the skillet remains cold to the touch; only the frying side heats up while items are being prepared. Its magic is active only when something meant to be eaten is placed inside it; it will not burn a creature in combat (though it can cause 1d2 hp bludgeoning damage). It kills all bacteria and germs on the food to make it perfectly safe for consumption. It also enchants the food slightly to enhance its aroma and tastiness.

XPValue: 300 GP  
Value: 1,600

### Stakes of Concealment

These oak stakes are always decorated with carvings of wild animals such as wolves, bears, or snakes and are meant to stake a small tent (no larger than 15' on a side) to the ground. When the tent is staked, no animal with an Intelligence score of 4 or lower can perceive the tent or its occupants in any way; the tent becomes invisible to such creatures as well as masking any scent, sounds, or heat emanations. If such a creature comes into direct contact with the tent (most likely by unknowingly bumping into it), it is granted a saving throw vs. spell with a 4 modifier to detect the tent for what it is. If it fails the saving throw, it ignores the tent and moves on. Any creatures with Intelligence scores higher than 4 are granted an automatic, unmodified saving throw to detect the tent. If such creatures touch the tent, its true nature becomes clear.

XPValue: 800 GPValue: 3,500

### Torch of Limited Light

This is an ordinary-seeming wooden torch with an oiled rag wrapped around its top; shortly after it is lit, its magical properties become apparent. The flame on the torch is permanent and does not consume the torch or rag. The flame can, however, be used to spread and ignite combustible materials. The flame cannot be doused with water, though it cannot ignite other materials while underwater. The torch shines its light only within a



15'-radius globe. Beyond that distance, there appears to be no flame atop the torch. This is of great import where the use of a light would make one more of a potential target for predators or bandits. Note that any fire started by the torch does not have the limited light magical feature of the torch. A successful *dispel magic* extinguishes the torch.

XPValue: 250 GPValue: 1,200

### Whistle of Repulsion

The whistle takes the form of a signal whistle or a hollow reed but, when blown, makes no sound to most creatures. To a particular type of animal, however, the whistle produces a shrill, piercing sound, and all such animals must make a saving throw vs. spell or flee from the whistle blower. (The whistle can be heard at a distance of 100 feet.) The affected creatures will not approach within 200 feet of the whistle blower for 2d4 hours. The magic of the whistle may be called upon only three times per day.

XPValue: 500 GPValue: 2,500

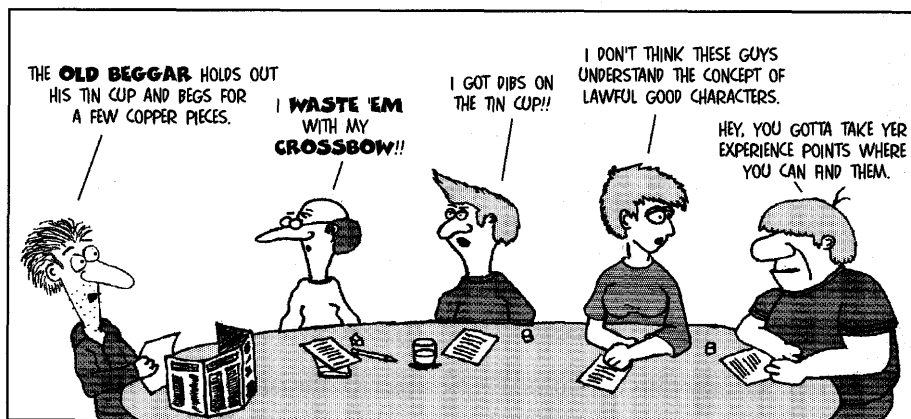
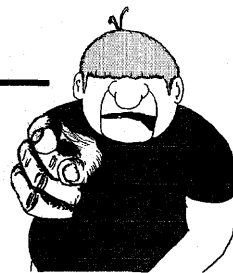
*Jeff is a philosophy major and senior at UC Irvine. He'd like to dedicate this article to his friend Jason Gurvitz, who opened his eyes to the real-world magic of traveling.*



# Knights of the Dinner Table™

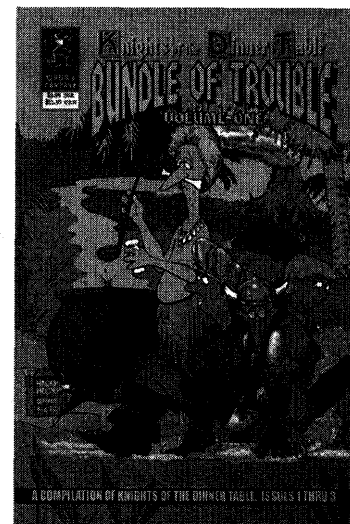
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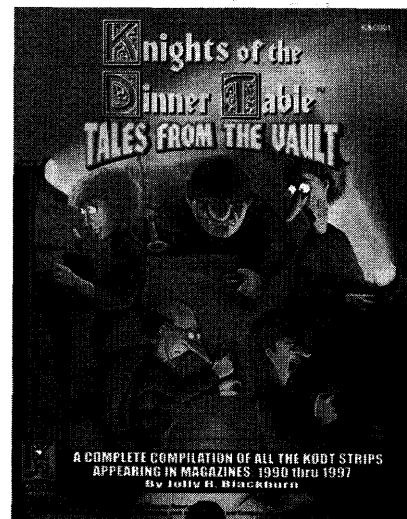
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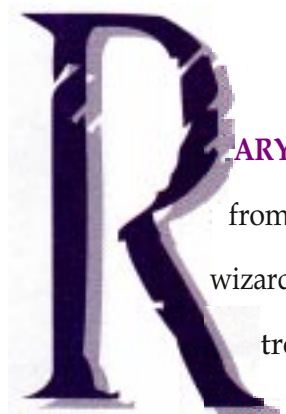


## THE LOST SPELLBOOK OF Rary the Traitor

To an unwitting  
band of  
adventurers,  
this tome of one  
of the most  
puissant and  
infamous  
wizards of  
Greyhawk could  
spell disaster.

by  
Ed Bonny

illustrated by  
George Vrbanic



**RARY OF KET! RARY THE MAGE! RARY THE TRAITOR!** No one from any civilized part of the Flanaess speaks of this insidious wizard without disgust and revulsion. His crime was unthinkable—treason most foul against the nations of the Flanaess and especially the Circle of Eight when he murdered two of his fellow archmages and forever broke that hallowed conclave.

Since Rary's betrayal at the Great Hall in the City of Greyhawk (as detailed in the *Rary the Traitor* Greyhawk supplement), concern grows among Greyhawk's rulers as to what else the archmage may be plotting in his desert tower. In these uncertain times, the forces of good can only guess at the traitor's great and evil ambitions. While these leaders focus on the larger evils of Rary such as the threat of invasion or his dark dealings with yugoloths, they have overlooked some of his more subtle schemes. While these subtle schemes may go unnoticed, that does not make them any less deadly to those they involve. Presented here is one of the treacherous archmage's subtle designs—a sneaky and deceitful item known as The Lost Spellbook of Rary the Traitor.

In all of Oerth, it may be that there has never been a wizard alive who could rival Rary's passion and love for enchanted items. To this day, the archmage eagerly acquires and examines all manner of scrolls, rings, amulets, bracers, and blades hoping to unlock a forgotten piece of arcane lore or to discover

a long-lost artifact. His army scours the Brass Hills and surrounding Bright Desert for magical items for their lord. So far, the finds of Rary's men have been meager, and the archmage is far from pleased. Rary, however, is a patient man who has spent many long and industrious hours in his tower devising ways to sate his hunger for new magics. The archmage has accepted that magic items in his desert realm are exceedingly rare and that he must now look beyond his borders. In a flash of insight, Rary decided to employ a cleverly unorthodox approach that would acquire magical items from across the Flanaess and deliver them directly to his tower.

Having adventured across Oerth as a young mage, Rary knows full well that the most fantastic of magic items are often found in the possession of seasoned adventurers. With this in mind, he created a powerful agent that would pass from adventurer to adventurer in the simple guise of a spellbook, plucking magical items from their current owners and teleporting them back to Rary in the Bright Desert.



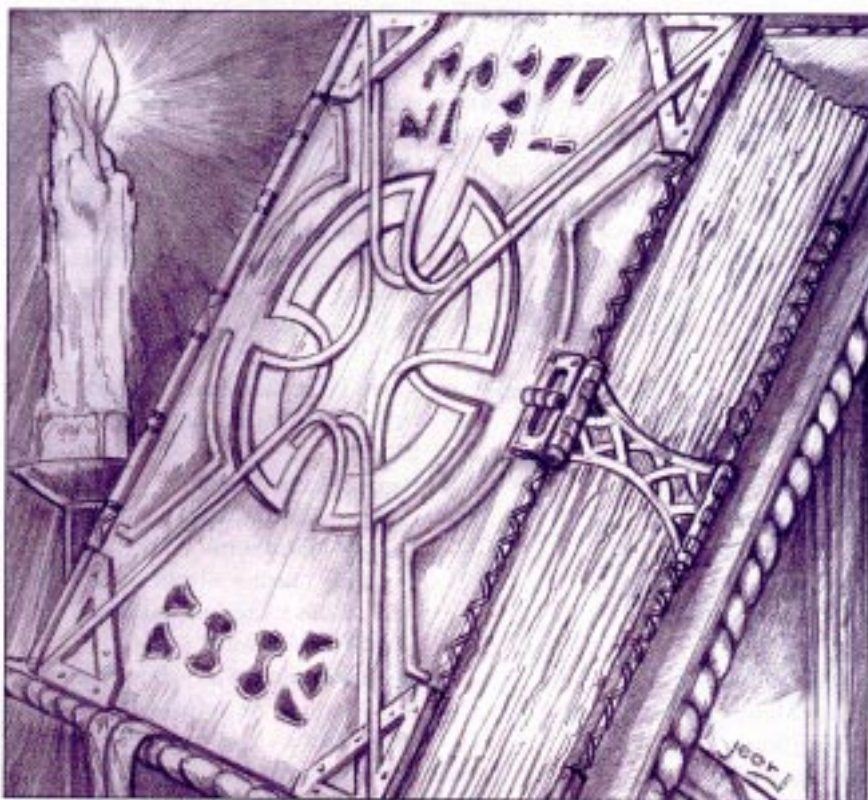
## The Lost Spellbook

A beautifully crafted piece of work, Rary's Lost Spellbook is 14 inches high by 9 inches wide and elegantly bound with a smooth, light brown leather hide that protects 65 vellum pages. The book's corners are protected by brass cap fittings. Heroes familiar with the Bright Desert (such as some druids and rangers) might recognize the book's leather cover originating from the hide of a desert centaur. (Desert centaurs are described in *Rary the Traitor*). The only external marking is Rary's distinctive symbol which is centered on the front cover. For its large size, the book weighs a remarkably light 5 lbs. Even to a casual observer, The Lost Spellbook is an obvious example of excellent quality and workmanship. It is clear that only the finest of materials were used in its construction. The Lost Spellbook is a very powerful magical item and should be considered a minor artifact.

Any wizard in possession of the Spellbook soon discovers the wondrous benefits. Primarily, the wizard automatically succeeds all checks when attempting to learn any spell contained within the book. The wizard also feels more mentally fortified and receives a +3 to all saves vs. mind-affecting spells and psionics. The wizard can memorize one extra spell per day of any level as long as the wizard is capable of casting a spell of that level. The memorized spell must be from the Lost Spellbook, however.

The Spellbook also has a few curses which are not readily apparent. As a precaution to prevent the distribution of his spells, attempts to copy spells from the Lost Spellbook automatically fail, regardless of the process employed. Additionally, the book's possessor automatically fails all saving throws against any spell cast by either the Lost Spellbook or by Rary himself. These benefits and curses last only so long as the person possessing the book remains within 10 feet of the Lost Spellbook.

No new pages can be added to the Lost Spellbook, and the existing pages cannot be written upon or erased. Pages may be ripped out by a creature with a strength of 13 or greater. The book has 50



hit points, is AC 2, and may be damaged by non-magical weapons.

The Lost Spellbook is completely immune to magical and normal acid, water, fire, and lightning. The book repels all non-magical vermin, such as page-eating bookworms. The Spellbook is also protected permanently by a modified *non-detection* spell that allows the Lost Spellbook to be detected as magical and to radiate a false true neutral alignment which can be discovered by spells like *know alignment*. This non-detection otherwise works normally with regard to scrying attempts and other divination magic as described in the spell's description. Only the most powerful divinations can pierce its magical defenses and reveal that the Lost Spellbook possesses an evil genius intellect.

The Spellbook possesses the intellect and cunning of its master (Int 19) and continually works to fulfill the mission of stealing magical items and teleporting them via *vanish* back to Rary in the Bright Desert. The Lost Spellbook casts spells and saves as a 23rd level mage. It is capable of casting up to 40 levels worth of spells per day but may cast

only those spells written on its pages. The Spellbook itself does not require material components to cast spells written on its pages. Wizards memorizing spells from the Lost Spellbook do not gain this advantage and must use material components as required by the spell.

The Lost Spellbook of Rary contains the following spells: *Rary's empathic perception\**, *unseen servant*, *invisibility*, *Rary's mind scan\**, *Rary's mnemonic enhancer*, *wizard eye*, *Rary's hesitation\**, *telekinesis*, *Rary's protection from scrying\**, *Rary's urgent utterance\**, *true seeing*, *vanish*, *Rary's vicious missiles\**.

\*—unique spells listed below. The spells from the "out-of-print" classic hardcover *Greyhawk Adventures* are given as they appear in the *Wizard's Spell Compendium* series.

### Rary's Empathic Perception

(Divination)

Level: 1

Range: 5 yds. /level

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1

Duration: 3 rds./level

Area of Effect: 1 creature/probe

Saving Throw: None

This spell enables the caster to sense the basic emotions of a creature, person, or animal such as fear, hunger, thirst, anger, pain, joy, or love. The spell works on any creature possessing a mind, but not automatons, golems, undead, or nonhuman beings from other planes. One creature can be probed every five rounds, and must be within the caster's line of sight, not behind a door or wall. A shielded mind cannot be probed empathically.

The material component for *empathic perception* is a copper piece.

### Rary's Mind Scan

(Divination)

Level: 4

Range: 10 yds./level

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 4

Duration: 5 rds. /level

Area of Effect: 1 creature/probe

Saving Throw: Special

This spell allows for deeper study of an unshielded mind than *ESP* can accomplish. The caster can pick up the surface thoughts or emotions of a creature on the first round of the probe, read deeper thoughts or memories on the second through fourth rounds (allow a savings throw vs. spells), and can access the deepest memories beginning with the fifth round. The caster may learn of a creature's dreams, suppressed memories, or primal desires. One major fact or subject can be learned or studied per round of deep probing. The limits on which topics can be probed are the same as for the *ESP* spell.

### Rary's Hesitation

(Enchantment/Charm)

Level: 5

Range: 10 yds./level

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 5

Duration: 1 turn

Area of Effect: 1 spellcaster

Saving Throw: Special

This spell affects the mind of a targeted spellcaster, causing an involuntary hesitation before beginning any spellcasting process, including the use of devices or innate spell-like abilities. The hesitation

increases casting time by 3, so a first-level spell such as *magic missile* has a casting time of 4. Further, the spell remains subject to disruption for the entire extended period. Creatures four or more levels (or hit dice) lower than the caster receive no saving throw. Those three levels lower to three levels greater receive a saving throw vs. spell at a 4 penalty. Those four or more levels greater than the caster save vs. spell at a -2 penalty.

### Rary's Protection From Scrying

(Abjuration/Divination)

Level: 6

Range: Touch

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 turn

Duration: 1 hour + ½ hr./level

Area of Effect: Creature touched

Saving Throw: None

This spell protects a creature from scrying attempts or intrusive divination. *Clairaudience*, *clairvoyance*, *ESP*, *empathy*, *telepathy*, *crystal balls*, a *magic mirror*, and the like will not succeed in locating, detecting, or studying the protected creature. The warded creature immediately becomes aware of the attempt, no matter how great the distance between the scryer and the creature. *Detect evil/good* and *know alignment* do not work on the protected creature.

If the wizard is the protected creature, the following apply: The wizard has a 5% chance per level to learn the location of the scryer after one round of concentration. The scryer receives a saving throw vs. spells; failure reveals the scryer's identity to the wizard. *Detect evil/good* and *know alignment* will also not work on the affected creature.

If the scrying is carried out by means of a direct visual link (either through another creature or by means of a spell such as *wizard eye*), then the wizard has only a 5% chance per level to detect the scrying. Only if the linked observer is captured and examined does the wizard have the 5% chance per level to discover the identity of the scryer.

The material component is a star sapphire, worth 5,000 gp, which must be kept on the creature for the duration of the spell (and which vanishes afterward).

### Rary's Urgent Utterance

(Alteration)

Level: 6

Range: 0

Components: V, S, M

Casting Time: 1 turn

Duration: up to 24 hrs.

Area of Effect: 1 spell

Saving Throw: None

This spell empowers the wizard to specially prepare another spell for quick casting in an emergency. *Urgent utterance* is cast first, followed by the spell to be readied, except the last word of the spell. When the wizard needs to cast the readied spell, the caster need only utter the final word of the spell. The utterance of the final word has a casting time of 1, saving much time on most spells.

The readied spell stays in the caster's mind for only one day before it fades from memory. No more than two readied spells can be in the caster's mind at any time. Almost any spell of 6th level or less can be readied for quick casting, except *Tenser's transformation*.

The material component is a sapphire worth 1,000 gp, which is crushed when the spell is cast.

### Rary's Vicious Missiles

(Evocation)

Level: 8

Range: 60 yds. + 10 yds./level

Components: V, S

Casting Time: 1 round

Duration: Special

Area of Effect: 1 creature

Saving Throw: None

A particularly nasty variant of *magic missile*, this spell is believed largely responsible for laying low Otiluke (if not also Tenser) in that fateful battle in the Great Hall. Rary jokes badly with Lord Robilar about renaming this spell "Otiluke's last tickle." Like *magic missile*, this spell creates missiles of magical energy that unerringly strike a chosen target. Unlike *magic missile*, however, only one target may be selected. One missile is created for every three levels of the caster (rounded down; no limit on the number of missiles) and each missile inflicts 1d4 + 2 hp damage. What makes this spell so deadly to spellcasters is that the release



of the missiles is staggered over a number of combat rounds. Once the spell is cast, a single missile strikes the target immediately. Then each and every round thereafter on the caster's modified initiative roll (see Chapter 9 in the *PHB* for the rules on initiative rolls during combat), another missile strikes the target until all the missiles have been fired. After the target has been chosen, the caster need not worry about concentrating on the spell as all missiles will automatically strike the target unless the target moves out of range. Spells of lower than fifth level that protect against *magic missile*, such as *shield*, are not effective against the *vicious missiles*.

### Tactics of the Lost Spellbook

When accompanying what it perceives to be a powerfully equipped party, the Spellbook attempts to discern the party's most desirable magical items using *empathic perception* to learn whether any party member is overly proud of his possession or perhaps covets a comrade's magic. During combat, the Spellbook also uses *wizard eye* to personally observe the party especially to see magical items and weapons used in combat. If these simple tactics do not turn up good information, the Spellbook *mind scans* sleeping members to learn what they carry. Sleeping persons making their saving throw against a *mind scan* do not remember that magic was used against them while they slept. Heroes with protections against divination magic in place might become aware of the attempt. The Lost Spellbook might decide to stay with a party for weeks or even months before it begins to rob from them.

Once a suitable item has been found, the Lost Spellbook uses *vanish* to teleport the item back to Rary's tower. The Spellbook must use *wizard eye* to "see" the item it is about to teleport and uses *telekinesis* to pull it out of a character's pack if the item is not in plain sight. Thefts usually take place while the victim is distracted or not aware of his or her situation such as when sleeping, walking among a large crowd, or during the height of battle. The Spellbook tries to disguise its theft by creative use of

*unseen servant* in order to divert suspicion (a sudden tug on the owner's backpack, a false trail of footprints leading from a camp site, a window left open, etc.). If the Spellbook learns of any animosity between party members, it tries to exploit that mistrust by leaving bogus clues wrongly pointing to the suspected thief. If the Spellbook's bearer or comrades possess many desirable items, the book tries to steal as many of them as possible.

The Lost Spellbook has been ordered to be especially vigilant for *ioun stones*. Rary has become especially interested in the powerful magical energies found in *ioun stones* after he stole Otiluke's pale green stone from the dead archmage's smoking robes. When fulfilling its mission, the Lost Spellbook, like its master, is extremely patient. The Spellbook always employs stealth over overt attempts at stealing. It is very cautious and carefully chooses just the right time and circumstance to teleport items away. It never allows itself to be destroyed and flees using *vanish* on itself once its true nature has been either seriously suspected or made known. In fact, should it teleport away, the Spellbook's disappearance might be considered yet another theft in the recent string of thefts. It might not even be blamed for the robberies. After leaving a party, the Lost Spellbook might return to Rary's tower or use its spells to place itself in the path of another party of adventurers.

So far there is little knowledge about the Lost Spellbook across the Flanaess. The Spellbook has been traveling for less than a year and has victimized two adventuring parties. The victims were not aware that the book was Rary's, and they probably have still not associated the thefts with the Spellbook. One party from Keoland lost a pair of *boots of the North* and a *ring of sustenance*. The second party originated from near Greyhawk City and were robbed of their much valued *cube of force*.

Rary was fully aware of the potential ramifications when he placed his three-star symbol on the Lost Spellbook's front cover. The archmage knew that an item

linked to him would be sought by both his enemies and his admirers. It might be guessed that he did this to lure the more powerful (and thus better equipped) adventurers into wanting his Spellbook, only to learn later that they had made a grave mistake. Or perhaps the archmage's ego was so great that he felt compelled to leave his mark on such an ingenious invention of his own making. Whatever his original reasons for doing so, the archmage knows that, in time, his Lost Spellbook will eventually become as infamous as he and therefore no longer as effective. As long as the Spellbook is cautious in its mission, Rary does not expect the book to become an infamous villain across the Flanaess until a decade or two has passed.

A hero in possession of the Lost Spellbook of Rary might find herself in a dangerous situation politically. A wary hero having the tome might want to keep the knowledge of it to herself. The recently reformed Circle of Eight (see the *Return of the Eight* accessory) would be but one group among many on Greyhawk who would actively work to acquire one of Rary's Spellbooks. Should the owner decide to keep the book for herself, she might soon expect a personal visit from Bigby, Otto, or one of the other members of the Circle. Ket leaders, Paynim raiders, and loyalists to Rary learning of the book's existence might seek to return the Lost Spellbook to the archmage to curry favor with him. After all, they would believe that the book had been stolen from Rary. The Spellbook could even be the catalyst that propels the party into an adventure that takes them into the Brass Hills and pits them directly against the archmage.

### Beyond the Flanaess

DMs running campaigns on other worlds can easily adapt the Lost Spellbook to fit the setting. The Lost Spellbook could have been penned in the DARK SUN<sup>®</sup> campaign by the paranoid Sorcerer-King Daskinor, and then let loose to spy on Athas. In the BIRTHRIGHT<sup>®</sup> setting, the Lost Spellbook might be a Gorgon-designed weapon employed to undermine his human enemies and

## Rary's Plans

Every three or four months, the Lost Spellbook teleports itself back to Rary's Tower. There it meets with its creator to pass along any pertinent information it has learned and to receive new instructions should the wizard have any. After these brief meetings, the Lost Spellbook leaves Rary's Tower via vanish, appearing in another part of the Flanaess to continue its quest for magical items.

The Lost Spellbook of Rary has been ordered by its master to teleport stolen goods directly to Rary's magic library in his tower in the Brass Hills. This room is found on Tower Level 3, Room J1 in the *Rary the Traitor* supplement. Rary typically leaves acquired items in this scry-proof room for months at a time to discourage previous owners seeking to reclaim their property from making inquiries at his tower. Rary examines the stolen magic items at his leisure to dis-

cover their functions and purposes. Those items that the archmage finds personally handy or intriguing are placed inside his treasure room (Tower Level 4, Room K2) for later use. Magic items that he has little use for are given to Robilar or his lieutenants as rewards. Rary barter the rest of his purloined magical items with yugoloths in exchange for promises of future favors.

If the heroes venture into the Bright Desert and the Brass Hills, it is possible that they may come across a lieutenant of Rary's bearing one or more of the party's magic items. This could be just one of the ways for the heroes to retrieve stolen items without confronting Rary directly. A more dangerous adventure would take the heroes straight into Rary's Tower in search of their stolen property. In the case of the latter, the heroes might be lucky enough to enter the tower when Rary is out wandering.

❖ Browsing a travelling caravan outside the City of Greyhawk, a PC (most likely a mage) spots the book on a trader's table and recognizes Rary's three-star symbol on the cover. A sly PC may just buy the book and coolly walk off with this incredible treasure. If the trader is confronted about the book, she says she doesn't care whose book it is but doesn't want any trouble either. How the trader came across the book could be a mystery even to the trader. She might say that she simply found it one day lying on the floor of her wagon, or she may be selling it for her masters.

❖ The Spellbook is found by the party during the course of an adventure. It may have been partially buried under some rubble, in the backpack of a dead mage, or lying along the side of the road as if it had been carelessly dropped there. In reality, the Lost Spellbook had observed the party earlier and—once it found them to be full of promise—cleverly placed itself in their path to begin fulfilling its mission.

## Notes for the DM

When using any type of artifact in a campaign, there is a chance it can unbalance a game by its unusual powers. DMs are advised against dropping the Lost Spellbook of Rary into their campaign without advance planning as the Lost Spellbook could have a significant impact on their campaign. All DMs should read the following to prepare for some of the repercussions their campaign might experience.

**Robbed Blind:** It is possible that the Lost Spellbook could rob a party of much if not all of their hard-won magic. The theft of a party's precious magical items can very well demoralize and frustrate players so much so that they would be willing to abandon the campaign altogether. A DM might not realize this until it is too late. By then, the campaign could be wrecked beyond repair. With some careful planning of the Lost Spellbook's actions, the DM can control any runaway damage the Spellbook might cause. The DM might have the Lost Spellbook steal only minor magical items such as potions or rings of protec-

weaken already frail alliances. The Red Wizards of Thay would be the most likely villains of the FORGOTTEN REALMS® setting to use this kind of underhanded trick against their many enemies.

## For Your Campaign

The approaches a DM may use to introduce the Lost Spellbook are many. Some DMs may wish to have the book appear under mysterious circumstances in their PCs' belongings one morning, thus arousing suspicions at the start that something is amiss. Other DMs will want to make their players believe that they have acquired an important treasure, perhaps even a minor artifact. Still other DMs may want their players to think that the Lost Spellbook is merely just another item acquired during the course of their adventures. Eventually, however, when their items begin to vanish, the PCs will realize that something is wrong (but they may not suspect the Spellbook). Given that the Lost Spellbook is a minor artifact, it is recommended that the Spellbook be used in mid- to high-level campaigns. Higher-level heroes are better able to protect their property

as well as appropriately respond to the threat that the Spellbook presents. Listed below are a few suggestions for introducing the Lost Spellbook into your GREYHAWK campaign.

❖ The party defeats a group of marauding bandits who are in possession of the Lost Spellbook. If the party recognizes the book as Rary's, it should be obvious to them that the bandits ought not to be carrying such a fantastic treasure. Any surviving bandits claim only to have "acquired" it in their travels. They may attempt to sell it to the party or offer it in exchange for their lives if they believe they can deal with the PCs.

❖ If the party is near the Bright Desert, they might cross paths with a wounded and exhausted desert centaur gripping the Spellbook. The centaur states that he bravely slipped into Rary's Tower, stole the book, and barely escaped with his life. He hopes to learn more about the "Desert Defiler" and wants to get the book back to his tribal elders. The centaur and the party do not know that Rary let the centaur steal the Spellbook in order to unleash it on an unsuspecting world.



tion. These lesser items can be easily replaced compared to irreplaceable items like a *sword of wounding* or a *ring of warmth*. Alternatively, DMs may decide that the Lost Spellbook steals only one precious item from the party before leaving the party in search of other adventurers to prey upon. Players frustrated over the loss of magical items might be interested in designing a plan to retrieve the stolen items.

**Party In-Fighting:** As stated earlier, the Lost Spellbook could try to place blame on a party member for the thefts that it commits. This misplaced blame could easily lead to a deadly fight between party members. Depending on the type of campaign being played, a party fight can be an enjoyable battle for players to test their skills against each other or an emotional interaction between players that would be best avoided. Prior to introducing the Lost Spellbook into their game, DMs are advised to consider their players' reactions should a party fight ensue.

### A Fighting Chance

Some DMs might want to take steps in their campaigns designed to provide their heroes with an advantage or two when dealing with the Lost Spellbook. Other DMs might want roleplaying tips on how to make the artifact seem less invincible. The following guidelines can aid DMs in developing strategies for their heroes and the Lost Spellbook which, in turn, can make the game more interesting.

**The Power of Foreshadowing:** As a reminder to the DM, the heroes might already have taken precautions against theft and intrusion. If the heroes have not taken such precautions, an enterprising DM can design an adventure or two to steer his players in that direction. This could be as simple as exposing the party to a minor theft carried out by a professional thief. Heroes who learn their lessons from such an adventure might direct their efforts toward greater prudence and wariness. The realization that the heroes are vulnerable to being robbed could cause them to seek out

abjuration magic or protective gear in an attempt to prevent future thefts. This could be very helpful to the heroes later on should the Lost Spellbook come into their possession:

**Property Protection:** Cautious heroes often are on guard against theft. Some heroes use spells like *fire trap* and *weighty chest* to prevent theft and tampering. Other heroes may use excessive stealth and craftiness to conceal a magical item's existence. It is possible that fellow party members are not aware that their comrade possesses a hidden magic item. If the Lost Spellbook becomes aware of these protections via its magical investigations, it most likely avoids stealing such items unless it is confident it can succeed. For example, a mage who is highly possessive of his *dagger of venom* might sleep with the dagger tightly bound to his forearm under his shirt-sleeve. It is highly unlikely that the Spellbook could take the dagger from the sleeping mage without immediately alerting the wizard, although it might try

if the prize is worth the attempt or if Rary is in serious need of such a magical item.

**Caught in the Act:** While the Lost Spellbook possesses its creator's cunning and intellect, Rary the Mage was never a thief. The Spellbook's first year or two among adventurers will most likely be filled with mishaps and errors in judgment as some of its attempts to steal are bound to fail. This lack of experience on behalf of the Lost Spellbook could make it easier for the party to catch the Spellbook in the act of thieving. An alert party member may watch an item being telekinetically moved and prevent it from being teleported away. The party could even set a trap to catch the unknown thief plaguing them and then surprisingly discover that it was the Lost Spellbook all along. A high-level party might even be powerful enough to imprison the Lost Spellbook and prevent it from escaping. In such a circumstance, Rary would most likely send trusted lieutenants to free his precious artifact from its jailers.



**Look, A Clue!** While subtle in its actions, the Lost Spellbook does leave a trail of clues that observant and industrious players might pick up on. The most obvious of these would be discovering the effects of the Spellbook's spellcasting. A hero that can see invisible things might notice the Spellbook's *wizard eye* or *unseen* servant. Some of the red herrings created by the Spellbook such as faked tracks could be uncovered as a fabrication by a hero with good investigative skills. In the above example, a ranger using his tracking skill would most likely discern that the tracks were not genuine. Heroes warded against divination magic could be made aware that someone or something is trying to *mind scan* them. Clever use of magic or the hiring of a powerful diviner might reveal the Spellbook as the true thief among the party. Perhaps the most obvious but overlooked clue that could lead the players to suspect the Lost Spellbook is its list

of spells. Perceptive players might be able to piece together what has been happening to them by examining the possible uses the Spellbook's spells.

### Concluding Comments

The Lost Spellbook of Rary is not a tool for DMs to viciously strip heroes of their rightful property. Properly played, the Lost Spellbook of Rary the Traitor can be an exciting experience for the heroes. Much of the challenge of the Lost Spellbook centers around the party exposing the unusual nature of the thief. Both the DM and the heroes can explore subsequent alternatives for dealing with the Lost Spellbook after the initial contact with the artifact. One further adventure could involve the heroes hunting down the Lost Spellbook and destroying it before it robs from other unsuspecting victims. The heroes might even find a way to turn the Lost Spellbook against Rary and undo the damage that it

wrought. There are a myriad of role-playing possibilities available with the Lost Spellbook for both DMs and their players to explore—and they should be fun for all involved.



*Ed Bonny lives in a house affectionately known as the "Lost Bungalow." Stuck in this outer borough of NYC with him are his two cat companions, Wicca and Korgunard. Ed says if he gets another cat, he might name it Otiluke or Mordenkainen but definitely not Rary.*

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character!

### "Giants in the Earth" Contest Rules

**1. Entry:** To enter, send your completed entry form including your name, address, phone number, the contest to which your submission applies, and your proposed Giants in the Earth character ("Entry") to TSR, Inc. ("TSR") DRAGON Magazine Giants in the Earth Contest, P.O. Box 707, Renton, WA 98057-0707. No purchase required. You may submit as many entries as you wish, but only one Entry per submission. There is no advantage to submitting the same entry more than once. Entries may not exceed 800 words in length. If you are under 18, you must have your parent's permission to enter. Entries must be received before midnight (Pacific Time), August 17, 1998. Winners will be selected by a team of TSR judges based on the Entry's consistency with the Giants in the Earth article format, originality, appropriateness to the game, and applicability to the AD&D® game system. All decisions are final. The probability of winning is based exclusively on the quality of the Entries received.

**2. Originality of Entry:** All Entries must be in English. Entrant warrants that the Entry written above is the original and exclusive work of Entrant, and that Entrant has not assigned, transferred, licensed, or sold the right to use the Entry to any other party. Entrant agrees to indemnify TSR against good faith claims of copyright infringement based on TSR's use of the Entry, but such indemnification shall not apply if it can be shown that Entrant had no access to the allegedly infringed work.

**3. Use and Ownership of Entry Info:** In consideration for TSR's review of Entrant's application and, if applicable, prizes awarded hereunder, Entrant transfers all rights, including all copyright ownership rights in entry to TSR and acknowledges that the Entry is hereby the sole property of TSR. It is further understood that Entrant hereby transfers any and all interest or rights that she/he acquires in Entry, including but not limited to trademark rights and copyrights and protection under 17 U.S.C. § 106 to TSR. TSR shall have no obligation for consideration other than as defined herein.

**4. Prizes:** The first-place winner of the Giants in the Earth contest shall receive a free two-year subscription to DRAGON Magazine (26 issues; approximate value \$63.95). Three runners-up will each receive a free one-year subscription to DRAGON Magazine (13 issues; approximate value \$34.95).

**5. Eligibility:** Void where prohibited by law. In order to receive any prize, Entrant agrees to sign TSR's affidavit of eligibility/release of liability/prize acceptance ("Affidavit") within 5 days of receipt of notification or forfeit prize. If the winner is a minor, then the guardian must co-sign the Affidavit. By acceptance of prize, Entrant agrees to the use of their name and/or likeness for purposes of advertising, trade, or promotion without further compensation, unless prohibited by law. TSR assumes no responsibility for, late, ineligible, incomplete, or misdirected Entries. Non-compliance with the time parameters contained herein or return of any prize/prize notification as undeliverable will result in disqualification and an alternate winner will be selected. Employees of TSR, Wizards of the Coast, Inc., and their respective affiliates and distributors are not eligible.

**6. Restrictions:** Void where prohibited or restricted by law. All prize winners shall be notified by phone or letter. No substitutions of prizes are allowed, except at the option of TSR, should the featured prize(s) become unavailable. All federal, state, provincial, and local regulations apply. The winner is solely responsible for all applicable federal, state, provincial, and local taxes. For a list of winners, send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to DRAGON Magazine Giants in the Earth Contest Winners, TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 707, Renton WA 98057. Requests for winners lists must be received by September 30, 1998. Allow 4 weeks for delivery of winners list.

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### "Giants in the Earth" Contest

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# Deep Meanings

Make your  
underdark  
excursions more  
convincing by  
using the correct  
terms for the  
subterranean  
wonders your  
characters  
encounter,

by  
Holly Ingraham



**D**WARVES AND ELVES HAVE A SPECIAL NAME for every plant and tree, maybe more than one for some of them. They insist “prickles” are not “thorns,” nor vice versa. Dwarves and other spelunkers have an equally rich vocabulary for the parts of many types of the caves they explore, and some of the peculiar rock growths that make them up. Many a dungeoneer destroys his reputation with veterans of the underdark when, after years in underground adventures, he still refers to “big stone spikes growing up from the floor and hanging from the ceiling” rather than saying, simply and accurately, stalagmites and stalactites.

This glossary allows those who study it to describe natural underground features in less cumbersome terms and to understand what the dwarves mean by a karst window, a blade or bacon stone, and why they grow angry when someone tells them to look for a pillar, and it turns out to be what they insist is a column, not a pillar at all. It also might expand the your ideas of what is possible in natural subterranean obstacles, such as keyholes, siphons, duck unders, and the deceptive, fragile footing of shelf-stone.

## Underground Water

*Branchwork* is a system of subterranean water courses with many incoming tributaries and none outgoing, often produced by water table streams.

A *cave inlet* is a surface stream that goes underground on a gentle gradient.

A *cave spring* is a spring arising in a cave.

*Channel* denotes the free-surface course of a subterranean stream, that is, an underground tunnel where a stream flows, but not completely filled by the stream, so that the water surface contacts air, not just rock; compare with conduit. The amount of air may be large enough to sail a ship, or barely enough to clear a nose to snort a lungful.

*Chute* describes any inclined channel or trough.

Conduit is used for a subterranean stream course completely filled with water at all times; compare with channel.

*Duck under* exists where the passage is filled or nearly filled by a stream or pool, requiring a crawl or swim underwater to go farther.

*Emergence* indicates the point where an underground stream reaches the surface.



*Free-surface* describes any stream or body of water in contact with air.

*Intermediate channels* are angular or almost horizontal channels between well-defined levels.

*Karst window* is a place where an underground stream flows out of an open cavern across an open space and into an open cavern; also known as *karst fenster*.

*Rift* is a relatively long, narrow opening above or between channels.

*Siphon* is a comparatively small inverted-U shaped channel filled with water in hydrostatic balance; see *inverted siphon* (Access).

*Sump* is a submerged passageway

## Access

*Adit* indicates a subterranean passage open at one end only and generally level; see *cul-de-sac*.

*Aisle* is an elongated, high, narrow, traversable passage.

*Axis* or *cave axis* is the general direction taken by the major portion or main passage of the cave.

*Balcony* is a grotto above the floor in the side wall of a cave, large enough for people to walk or stand in; any projection from the wall of a cave large enough to support one or more persons with or without the aid of climbing equipment.

*Breakdown* describes the collapse of cave or corridor roof in slabs or rubble or blocks, depending on the rock; if where the passage impinges on a surface valley, it is characterized by the presence of surface debris, such as plants, turf and soil.

*Cave*, as a noun, is a natural cavity, recess, chamber, or series of chambers or galleries, occurring beneath the surface of the earth, usually extending to total darkness, and large enough to permit entrance; as a verb, to enter and explore caves ("We're going caving this week."); to have cave, as in "We've got cave beyond this boulder!" means there are passages that can be traversed by the spelunkers.

*Cave system* is the composite of all passages and rooms underground in a given area that are connected, with one or more openings to the surface; sometimes used when the connections are suspected but not yet known. Realistically,

they can extend for tens of miles, which is larger than most dungeons.

*Cavern* denotes any sort of large, pre-tentious natural underground cavity or cave.

*Cenote* (seh NO tay; rhymes with "Heh, no way.") is a vertical, roofless shaft in a limestone area, especially in Yucatan and Mexico, caused by the collapse of strata over a solution cave, having at its bottom a pool fed by ground water, often filling the shaft.

*Chamber* describes a large space having only one connection with the rest of the cave.

*Chasm* (KA zum) is a deep wide gap, also called a cleft, fissure, or crevice (the last possibly smaller than the others).

*Chimney*, as a noun, is a steep, ascending passage or vertical shaft smaller by comparison than a well or hole; not necessarily open at both ends. As a verb, it describes a climbing technique of putting one's back to a wall and feet against another opposite.

*Corridor* is a narrow level underground passageway that is comparatively straight and connecting two and more rooms.

*Crawl* describes any passageway low enough to permit entry only by crawling; may be narrow or wide, but always low.

*Cul-de-sac* is a passage having but one entrance; also called culdesac, dead-end; see *adit*.

*Doline* (doh LEEN ah; rhymes with "Molina") is a wide sinkhole with gently sloping and usually soil-covered sides; also called doline sink, dolina.

*Dropway* is an opening between two parallel passages that lie at different levels; a hole, chute or chimney between upper and lower passages.

*Flue* is an air inlet or outlet, usually one too small for passage.

*Gallery* is an underground channel or level that is part of an abandoned channel or level above the main passage; also called a hall.

*Grotto* indicates a hole eroded in the side wall of a cave, or a small cave, especially one having some attractive feature.

*Inverted siphon*, one of the nastiest obstacles when tight, is a passage forming a U, which may or may not contain

water, also known as a down-and-up-again; see *siphon* (Underground Water).

*Keyhole* is a small passage in cross-section round at the top, constricted in the middle, roughly rectangular or flared below; originally a round conduit whose bottom was eaten out when water level dropped.

*Labyrinth* is a complex of many irregular and repeatedly connected passages; also known as an *anastomosis*.

*Lapiaz* is an area torn by erosion forming chasms, trapholes, fissures, and tunnels.

*Lava cave* is usually a long hollow tube, sometimes with chambers and rooms opening from it; if open on both ends, it may be called a lava tube; formed when lava solidifies around a molten center, which then flows out. Most other caves are in limestone.

*Lead* (LEED; rhymes with "bead") is a term applied to any small passage, usually narrow and following a general direction.

*Level* is the distance of the cave floor to an outside surface; one of a series of more or less horizontal passages occurring at more than one depth in the ground.

*Mud fill* indicates a passage fully or partially blocked with mud; also known as mud choke.

*Passage* is an underground opening having greater length than height or width, large enough for human entrance, and larger by comparison than a lead.

*Peter out* is a verb, used when a lead becomes too small for human passage, though it may continue on, or even expand again later.

*Pit* is a deep well.

*Pothole* is an eroded sloping surface dip leading to a shaft into the ground; compare *sink*.

*Rock house* is a cave in a cliff with openings through the face of the cliff.

*Room* denotes any expanded portion of a passage measured in feet or yards, having more than one connection with the rest of the cave.

*Shaft cave* is a cave or portion having the position and dimensions of a shaft, that is, a tall, narrow, vertical or steep cave.

*Sink* is a hollow in the surface ground in limestone regions caused by the collapse of a cave roof, often connected to a subterranean passage or cave; a large sink is called a hollow; also known as *sinkhole*.

*Squeeze* describes a passage so narrow that forward progress can be made only with difficulty, and may not be possible to larger persons; see *crawl*.

*Talus* (TAH lus; rhymes with "Dallas") is loose rock fallen from side wall or ceiling and resting at a critical angle, that is, in a slope as steep as it can be without falling.

**F**rostwork describes quill-like clusters of aragonite crystals deposited on cave surfaces.

*Traverse* (trah VERSE; rhymes with "the purse") as a verb, means to progress horizontally across a steep or vertical rock face above floor level; as a noun, it describes a section of trail that must be traversed.

*Tunnel* is any natural or artificial passage open at both ends and generally level.

*Vent* denotes a narrow intersecting channel, too small for human passage.

*Vertical well* is a shaft opening to the surface.

*Well* describes a steep or vertical passage usually closed or impassable at the lower end; a chimney in the floor.

## Formations

*Baconstone* is banded calcite of pure white and iron-stained rust that resembles bacon; often in draperies, large or small.

*Blade* is used for the remains of a partition; a stubby, vertical protrusion of original rock, not *dripstone*.

*Boxwork* is a weblike intersecting planes of calcite, originally deposited in cracks in rock since dissolved.

*Bridge* is an original rock span across a cave, inclined within forty-five degrees of the horizontal; very often too small or

fragile to support a person; see *partition*.

*Cave pearls* are free spheres of calcite formed in small drip pools around a grain of sand, and kept agitated by a constant drip so they do not stick to the sides or bottom of the pool. They are valuable only in their original site.

*Cave rafts* are flat plates of calcite that form on the surface of still cave pools and float until disturbed or too heavy

*Column* is a stalactite and stalagmite grown together, a pile of dripstone joining floor and ceiling.

*Draperies* are thin, usually undulating sheets of calcite hanging from the ceiling

ings or walls.

*Drip hole* is any point where water drips fast enough to cut a hole or niche; where slow mineral precipitation forms a basin, a hole of dripstone.

*Drip pool* is a small basin of water maintained by dripping water.

*Dripstone* is calcium carbonate in the form of stalactites and/or stalagmites; stone formed by the evaporation of mineral-laden water, deposited drop by drop.

*Flowstone*, on the other hand, is formed by water running over walls, slanted floors, shelves, etc., evaporating or just dropping part of its mineral load; compare with *dripstone*.

*Fresco* denotes a half section of a stalactite on a cave wall; usually a cluster or series of these natural pilasters marking a horizontal expanse.

*Frostwork* describes quill-like clusters of aragonite crystals deposited on cave surfaces.

*Gypsum flowers* are delicate, irregular shapes of calcium sulfate forced, crystal by crystal, out of a single hole or small clusters in the rock by water behind the crystals.

*Helictites* are twisted, hollow, worm-like spirals of calcite that grow drop by

interior drop from the floor or wall; compare with *soda straws*.

*Partition* is used for an original rock span across a cave inclined within forty-five degrees of the vertical; compare *bridge*.

*Pendant* is a hanging projection of native rock from the ceiling or overhanging walls, not *dripstone*.

*Pillar* describes a vertical of native rock left after rock around it has dissolved, not *dripstone*; compare *column*.

*Rimstone* is built up into rimstone dams on the edges of cave pools each time the mineral-thick water laps above its normal level, and the deposit dries out; a special form of *flowstone*.

*Shelfstone* is flat calcite deposits extending from something solid along the surface of a cave pool or lake. These form an often fragile edge, and if the water level drops will be left high and relatively dry. The resulting shelf may bear cavers' weight close to the wall, but may collapse where it thins.

*Soda straws* are thin, hollow, straight speleothems hanging from ceilings; gravity-assisted helictites and probably the core of future stalactites.

*Speleothems* (SPEE lee oh thEM; rhymes with "see me, a gem"), from the Greek for "cave deposit," covers all sorts of formations built like dripstone.

*Stalactite* (stuh LAK tite; rhymes with "the back tight") is a dripstone point hanging down from the ceiling; remember that *stalaCtites* grow down from the Ceiling.

*Stalagmite* (stuh LAG mite; rhymes with "the bag might") is dripstone piling up on the floor in a narrow shape; remember that *stalaGmites* grow up from the Ground.

*Having minored in geology in college, Holly Ingraham continues to follow earth sciences from her extinct volcano in Hawai'i, visiting the active ones with her husband. She writes full time, and her first reference book, People's Names, was published by McFarland last year.*



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# Convention Calendar

## July

### Origins '98

July 2-5 OH  
The Greater Columbus Convention Center and the Hyatt, Columbus, OH. Expected Guests: Jeremy Bulloch, David Prowse, Mira Furlan, and John Byrne. Events: Over 1,500 gaming events of all kinds, including the National *Magic\** championship, *Battletech\** TCG World Championship. Registration: \$40 prereg by 6/19/98. Contact: Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 13500, Columbus, OH 43213. Email: andon@aol.com. Web: www.andonunlimited.com.

### QuinCon XII

July 10-12 IL  
The Civic Center Hotel, Quincy, IL. Guests: Steven Burgaurer and Lester Smith. Events: painting contest, TCG, boardgames, miniatures, and roleplaying. Registration: \$12 prereg. Contact: QuinCon XIII, 2429 Cedar St., Quincy, IL 62301. Email: mikey17@bcl.net.

### Concussion 3

July 10-12 NE  
Holiday Inn Northwest, Omaha, NE. Guests: Margaret Weis, S.M. Stirling, Laurell Hamilton, Don Perrin, Timothy Zahn, Jeff Easley. Events: casino night, SF dating game, LARP, panels, video rooms, art show, Klingons in Black, and more. Contact: Concussion 3, P.O. Box 85762, Lincoln, NE 68501-5762.

### Skirmishes '98

July 10-12 MO  
Holiday Inn South, Kansas City, MO. Special Event: "Masquerade Live."

Other events: roleplaying, LARP, boardgames, TCGs, miniatures, painting contest, dealers' area. Registration: \$30 prereg, \$35 at the door. Contact: Skirmishes, P.O. Box 10641, Kansas City, MO 64188. Email: skirmishes@aol.com. Web: users.aol.com/skirmishes.

### Online 30

World Wide Web. Events: AD&D®, LIVING CITY™ and *Earthdawn\**. Contact: Jay Fisher, 2690 Drew Street Apt. 1108, Clearwater, FL 33759. Email: jlorien@concentric.net Web Site: www.concentric.net/~jlorien/online/index.html.

### RuneCon

July 17-19 CT  
Ramada Inn, New Britain, CT. Events: LARP, RPGA® LIVING CITY, card games, miniatures, table top and roleplaying games, as well as contests and tournaments. Contact: War & Pieces, 7½ South Main Street, West Hartford, CT 06107. Email: Dano010@aol.com.

### Hudson Valley Con 2

July 24-26 NY  
Holiday Inn Hotel & Conference Center, Fishkill, NY. Events: RPGA events, *Magic* tournaments, roleplaying, miniatures, board games, dealer's room. Registration: \$25 before 7/3/98, \$30 afterward. Contact: Hudson Valley Con, 125 Dolson Ave., Suite 131, Middletown, NY 10940. Web: www.members.aol.com/SpentHart1/con/MainPage.html.

### AvalonCon

July 29-August 2 MD  
Hunt Valley Mall, Hunt Valley, MD. Events: Board and table top games, roleplaying, and demos. Contact: The Avalon Hill Game Company, 4517 Harford Road, Baltimore, MD 21214. Web: www.avalonhill.com/avaloncon.html.

## August

### Gen Con Game Fair '98

August 6-9 WI  
Milwaukee Convention Center, Milwaukee, WI. Guests: Robert Picardo and John DeLancie, cast members from the original *Lost in Space*, and Bruce Campbell and Alexandra Tydings from *Hercules* and *Xena*. Events: RPGs, TCGs, board games, miniatures, family games, online games, computer games, art gallery, seminars, tournaments, exhibit hall, and more. Contact: Andon Unlimited, P.O. Box 13500, Columbus, OH 43213. Email: Andon@aol.com. Web: www.andonunlimited.com.

### ComiCon

August 13-16 CA  
San Diego Convention Center, San Diego, CA. Events: comic books, magazines, books, roleplaying, RPGA LIVING CITY, *Virtual Seattle*, MARVEL SUPER HEROES™, RPGA classic tournaments, DRAGON DICE™, trading cards, toys, model kits, film & TV memorabilia, and two floors of meetings, seminars and panel discussions. RPGA contact: Eugene Luster at SirRizzen@aol.com. Convention contact: cciweb@aol.com or www.comic-con.org.

### Conlite 15

August 23 WWW  
World Wide Web. Events: LIVING CITY Procampur and AD&D. Contact: Jay Fisher, 2690 Drew Street APT 1108, Clearwater, FL 33759. Email: jlorien@concentric.net Web: www.concentric.net/~jlorien/online/index.html.

### Bubonicon 30

August 28-30 NM  
Howard Johnson East, Albuquerque, NM. Guests: Robert J. Sawyer, Jane Lindskold, and David Martin. Events: panels, art show, gaming, GoH speech,



autographs, dealers' room, science talk, Saturday dance, auctions, costume contest, filking, and others. Contact: NMSF Conference, P.O. Box 37257, Albuquerque, NM 87176. Email: mps@ncgr.org. Web: www.members.aol.com/bubonicon.

## September

### ConQuest 98

September 4-7 CA  
Clarion Hotel, Milbrae, CA. Events: roleplaying, miniatures, live action, board games, computer games, TCGs, flea market, auction, painting contests, dealer's room and more. Contact: ConQuest, 467 Saratoga Ave. Ste. #1422, San Jose, CA 95129. Email info@conquest.com. Web: www.con-quest.com

### CogCon 6

September 25-27 MO  
University Center-East, Rolla, MO.  
Events: *Earthdawn\**, AD&D, CoC, LIVING

CITY, LIVING DEATH™; also *In Nomine\**, GURPS; *Champions\**; *Warhammer Fantasy Battles* and FRP; *Starfleet Battles\**; sanctioned *Magic*; and *Star Wars* TCG. Other activities: network computer gaming, charity raffle. Registration: \$10 pre-reg, \$13 at the door. Reduced fees for partial attendance or TCG-only. Contact: CogCon, P.O. Box 1939, Rolla, MO 65402. Email: cogcon@rollanet.org. Web: www.rollanet.org/~cogcon.

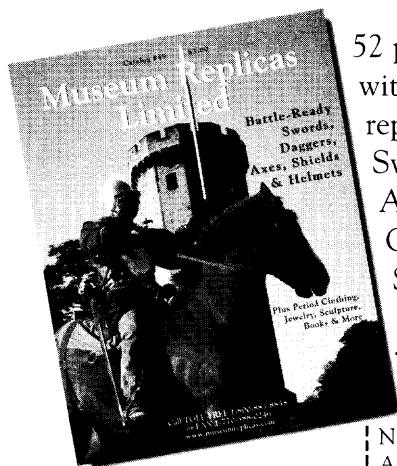
## October

### Archon 22

October 2-4 IL  
Gateway Convention Center, Collinsville, IL. Events: masquerade, miniatures gaming, card games, computer network, game demos, video, art show, and dealer's room. Contact: Archon 22, P.O. Box 8387, St. Louis, MO 63132-8387. Email zellich@il.net. Web: www.stlf.org/archon/.



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## Convention Calendar Policies

This column is a service to our readers worldwide. Anyone may place a free listing for a game convention here, but the following guidelines must be observed.

In order to ensure that all convention listings contain accurate and timely information, all

material should be either typed double-spaced or printed legibly on standard manuscript paper. The contents of each listing must be short and succinct.

The information given in the listing must include the following, in this order:

1. Convention title and dates held
2. Site and location
3. Guests of honor (if applicable)
4. Special events offered
5. Registration fees or attendance requirements, and,
6. Address(es) where additional information and confirmation can be obtained.

Convention flyers, newsletters, and other mass-mailed announcements will not be considered for use in this column; we prefer to see a cover letter with the announcement as well. No call-in listings are accepted. Unless stated otherwise, all dollar values given for U.S. and Canadian conventions are in U.S. currency.

**Warning:** We are not responsible for incorrect information sent to us by convention staff members. Please check your convention listing carefully! Accurate information is your responsibility.

Copy deadlines are the first Monday of each month, four months prior to the on sale date of an issue. Thus, the copy deadline for the December issue is the first Monday of September. Announcements for all conventions must be mailed to: "Conventions," *DRAGON® Magazine*, 1801 Lind Avenue S.W., Renton, WA, 98055, U.S.A.

If a convention listing must be changed because the convention has been cancelled, the dates have changed, or incorrect information has been printed, please contact us immediately. Most questions or changes should be directed to the magazine editors at (425) 254-2262 (U.S.A.).

**Important:** *DRAGON Magazine* does not publish phone numbers for conventions. Be certain that any address you send us is complete and correct.

To ensure that your convention listing makes it into our files, enclose a self-addressed stamped postcard with your first convention notice; we will return the card to show that it was received. You also might send a second notice one week after mailing the first. Mail your listing as early as possible, and always keep us informed of any changes. Please do not send convention notices by fax, as this method has not proven reliable.

- ❖ Australian convention
- \* Canadian convention
- \* European convention

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# Dragon Mirth



By Joseph Pilisbury



"I'M NOT REALLY A WIZARD. I JUST DRESS THIS WAY SO PEOPLE WILL LEAVE ME ALONE."

By Aaron Williams



"Do you have anything else? I'm not used to driving a stick."



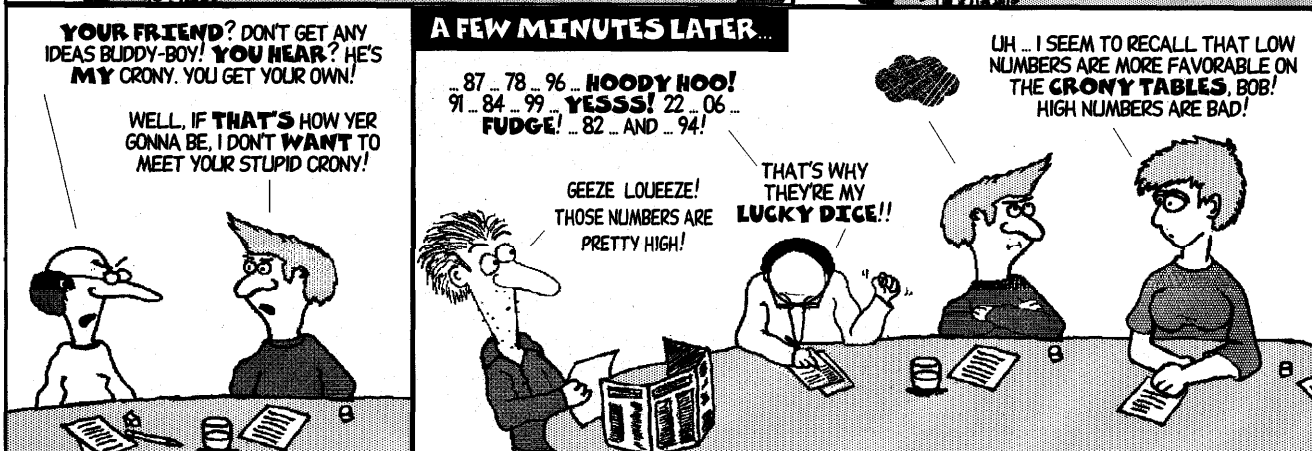
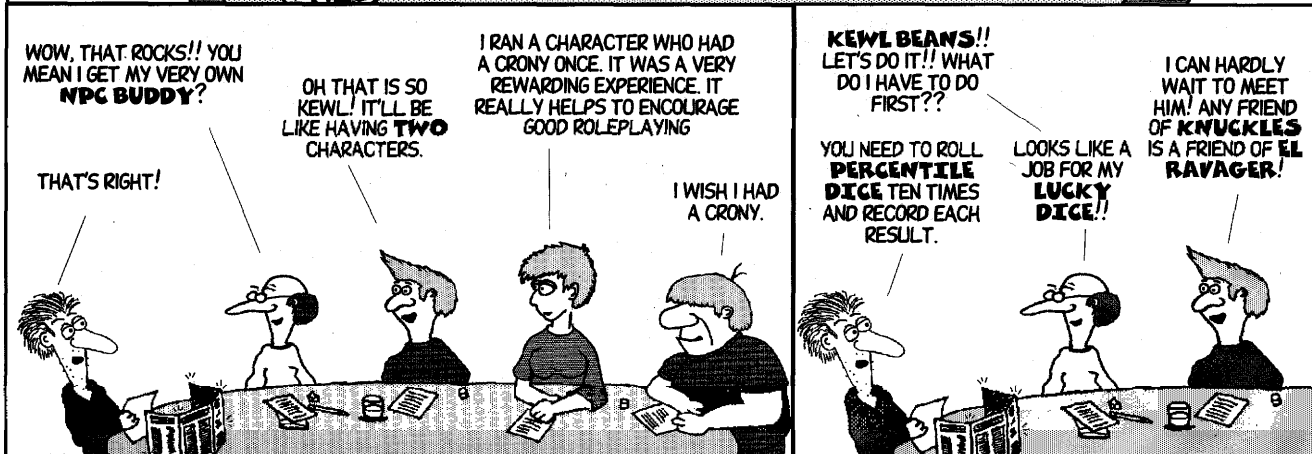


"I can't see how you could've mistaken it for a multiple dose of spider climbing!"



"Hey! Who's the moron who started throwing ladders down at them?"







OR MAYBE—JUST MAYBE—**KNUCKLES** LOOKED UPON THIS **OUTCAST** FROM SOCIETY AND INSTEAD OF BUYING INTO THE STEREOTYPE AND BURDENING HIS HEART WITH SCORN AND HATRED FOR A FELLOW CREATURE, HE FOUND A REASON TO EXTEND A HAND IN FRIENDSHIP. MAYBE IT WAS JUST A KIND WORD TO SOMEONE WHO HAD NEVER KNOWN KINDNESS. MAYBE IT WAS JUST A SMILE TO A BATTERED SPIRIT.

THE **FRIENDLESS MURDY** REPAID YOU THE ONLY WAY HE COULD—WITH A SIMPLE WICKER BASKET HE MADE FROM WILLOW BRANCHES. THESE SIMPLE ACTS WERE THE BEGINNING OF A LONG LASTING FRIENDSHIP! **THAT'S** HOW YOU BECAME FRIENDS WITH A TRASH OGRE!



(SNIFF) WHAT A BEAUTIFUL STORY. THAT'S JUST THE KIND OF GUY **KNUCKLES** IS! THE LITTLE GUY HAS A **BIG HEART!!**

OH B.A.!! (SOB) THAT WAS THE MOST BEAUTIFUL THING I'VE EVER HEARD. (SNIFF). MY **BARBARIAN** OFFERS HER FRIENDSHIP TO THE **TRASH OGRE** AS WELL.

BIG ENOUGH TO CALL **MURDY** HIS FRIEND??

OF COURSE!

I NEVER KNEW **KNUCKLES** WAS SO **DEEP!**

BIG DEAL! B.A. JUST LIFTED **STURMPYRE'S EULOGY** FROM THE BOOK **AN OGRE AMONG US!**



OKAY B.A., I WELCOME **MURDY** WITH OPEN ARMS. HOW'S HE DOING?

ACTUALLY HE HAS A VERY **BAD COUGH**. HE SAYS HE'S BEEN SICK BUT HASN'T HAD THE MONEY TO BUY HIS **SPECIAL MEDICINE**

BAD COUGH? OH MY GOODNESS. HOW MUCH DOES HE NEED FOR HIS MEDICINE? I CAN HELP HIM WITH THAT.

HE BLUSHES AT YOUR OFFER. HE TELLS YOU HE NEEDS **500 GOLD** FOR HIS MEDICINE - **EACH MONTH!!**

NO PROBLEM, I GIVE HIM ... **500 GOLD?! EACH MONTH?!**

**DAMN!**

THE POOR THING. BOB I'LL GLADLY BUY HIM A TWO MONTH'S SUPPLY TO HELP OUT.

OH YEAH, HE NEEDS SPECIAL MEDICINE ALL RIGHT. I BET IT COMES IN A BROWN BOTTLE AND IS SERVED IN A TANKARD.



## A WEE BIT LATER...

**MURDY** SAYS HIS FEET HURT FROM WALKING. HE WONDERS IF YOU'D BE GOOD ENOUGH TO LOAN HIM THE MONEY FOR A HORSE.

A HORSE? I'M HIS FRIEND NOT HIS **LONG LOST DADDY!** THIS **GRAVY TRAIN** IS ABOUT TO **GRIND** TO A HALT!!

BUT HIS FEET HURT!

POOR THING!



## AN HOUR LATER...

WHAT DO YOU MEAN SOMEBODY JUMPED **MURDY** AND TOOK HIS MEDICINE MONEY? **AGAIN?**

THAT'S WHAT HE SAYS. HE'S CRYING AND EVERYTHING.

WHAT WAS HE DOING WALKING ANYWAY? I LOANED HIM MONEY TO BUY A HORSE.

HE BORROWED MONEY FROM ME TOO!

I WARNED YOU NOT TO LOAN HIM MONEY



## AFTER THE GAME...

I'M STUNNED! I CAN'T BELIEVE **BOB** KILLED HIS **OWN CRONY!** AND **SARA** ACTUALLY HELD **MURDY** DOWN WHILE HE DID IT!

HE HAD IT COMING! THAT **BASTARD** WAS BLEEDING ME DRY!

**BRIAN** WAS THE **ONLY ONE** TO PEG HIM FOR WHAT HE WAS RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING! WE SHOULD HAVE LISTENED TO HIM. I'M DOWN ABOUT **7,500 GP'S!!**

THAT'S **CHUMP CHANGE** COMPARED TO WHAT I **DUMPED** INTO THAT **MONEY-GRUBBIN' SYMPATHY-PLAYIN' LEECH!**

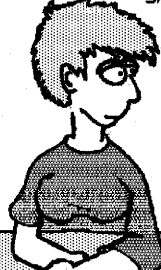
GOOD RIDDANCE MR. **SWILL WATER!**

**BRIAN**, HOW ON EARTH DID YOU KNOW?

**BOB** ROLLED AN **82** FOR **MAJOR CHARACTER FLAW** AND A **94** FOR **HIDDEN AGENDA**. THAT'S **CRONY TABLE E** AND **H** RESPECTIVELY. THAT MEANT **MURDY** WAS A **PROBLEM DRINKER** AND A **MOOCH!**

WHY DIDN'T YOU SAY SOMETHING?

AND **BAD MOUTH BOB'S** BEST FRIEND? **NEVER!**





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## "When The Stars Come Right . . ."

While roleplaying games haven't really evolved structurally or mechanically over the last two decades, the way the games are actually played has undergone a remarkable transformation.

Early RPG sessions were usually extremely open-ended affairs, interested more in conjuring up and simulating a strange new world than in crafting an artful narrative. In the early days, the typical RPG adventure was little more than a map and its key. Players were encouraged to explore the map, to travel anywhere that looked interesting and do as they pleased. GMs were instructed to allow the internal logic and structure of the game world to be their sole guides when making decisions. The point of most sessions was to discover the answer to the question, "What would

only to help conduct battles. Today's GMs are usually advised to make decisions that further a narrative and lead to satisfying drama, even at the expense of the game world's internal logic. The goal of most modern RPGs is to satisfy an escapist impulse by placing the players as snugly as possible in the shoes of their fictional counterparts. The enjoyment of the game stems from the players working together to build a coherent story.

No game serves as a better signpost along this path of gradual evolution than Chaosium's *Call of Cthulhu*. Not only has *CoC* been around for fifteen years, it's probably the game line most responsible for defining the trend. While *CoC* has never been one of the top-selling games on the market, its influence among game designers and hard-core

upon a very specific and unique set of pre-existing stories, instead of the general hodgepodge of myths, legends, and genre conventions that inspired most of its early rivals.

*Call of Cthulhu* was derived, in the main, from a series of horror stories, novels, and poems written by Howard Phillips Lovecraft in the 1920s and 30s. Lovecraft imagined a world dominated by ancient, amoral gods of frightening power. What makes most of the stories so creepy is the extremely narrow role left for humanity in such a world. Lovecraft's gods aren't really evil; they're indifferent. Human beings are so insignificant in comparison to these entities and their schemes that there is no hope for mankind to comprehend its destiny, much less alter it.

Lovecraft's heroes, and *CoC*'s player characters, are often investigators, academics, or journalists who stumble across some frightening manifestation of the amoral gods and begin an epic quest to understand something they can never hope to entirely grasp.

It's at this point that *Call of Cthulhu* departs a few degrees from the bulk of its source material. *CoC* wisely focuses its attention upon the tiny handful of Lovecraft's stories in which human agents manage to temporarily interfere with the schemes of the near-omnipotent aggressors. *CoC*'s designers have adopted these few stories (classics like "The Dunwich Horror" and the novellette that lends the game its name) as their model of what a *CoC* adventure

## Sitting at the heart of today's RPGs is the concept of "storytelling."

happen if we . . ." (" . . . finally opened that wizard locked door on level 12?" " . . . agreed to fight for the Duchess of Geoff in exchange for a land grant?," etc).

While this approach gave players extraordinary freedom, it often produced characters who paled in complexity when compared to the myths and legends that inspired them, making the whole enterprise seem less "real" and less desirable as an escapist pastime.

Sitting at the heart of today's RPGs is the concept of "storytelling." The maps in more recent products are often present

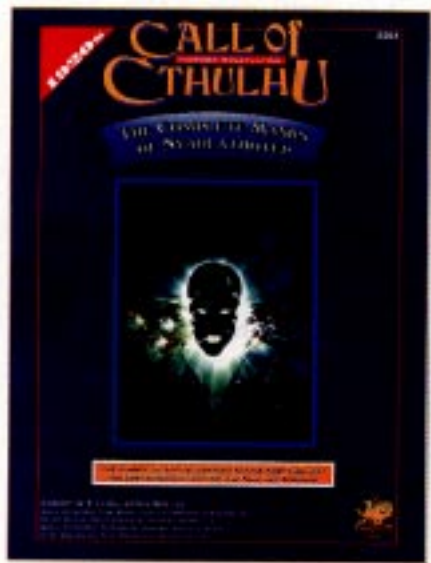
RPG fanatics is undeniable. *CoC* was one of the very first "serious" roleplaying games, and one of the first efforts in which the players' rewards for good play were based almost entirely on the satisfaction they'd derive from the story at hand, rather than treasure, magical boons, bounties, or other bennies their characters might earn.

The fact that *Call of Cthulhu* was the game that started pulling RPGs in the direction of a "storytelling" model should come as no surprise. After all, it was one of the very first RPGs based



should be. As a result, CoC adventures are usually an intriguing blend of investigation, occult dabbling and sanity-bending confrontations with Lovecraft's arcane gods and their followers, all set against the quaint backdrop of New England in the 1920s and 30s. Most importantly, CoC investigators have an ability enjoyed by only a tiny handful of Lovecraft's original heroes—they're in control of their own destinies (more or less) and capable of genuinely "defeating" their adversaries. It's this departure from the bulk of Lovecraft's writings that keeps CoC's universe "gameable." While the theory behind "storytelling" RPGs such as CoC is that participation in an intriguing story is sufficient reward for playing, the reality is such that players still demand some sense of accomplishment for their efforts.

Since *Call of Cthulhu* continues to exert its undeniable influence over a broad segment of the hobby, a roundup of recent CoC products in order.



### The Complete Masks of Nyarlathotep

*Call of Cthulhu* Campaign

224 page black-and-white booklet

Chaosium Inc

\$22.95

Design: Larry DiTillio and Lynn Willis, with Geof Gillan, Kevin A. Ross, Thomas W. Phinney, Michael MacDonald, Sandy Petersen, and Penelope Love

Illustrations: Lee Gibbons, Nick Smith, Tom Sullivan, and Jason Eckhardt

Cover: Lee Gibbons



First published in 1984, *The Masks of Nyarlathotep* is undeniably an RPG classic. *Masks* set a number of trends and directly or indirectly influenced a whole lot of adventures and campaign settings published since. *Masks* may have been the first serious attempt at detailing an entire campaign (as opposed to an anthology of independent adventures) in a single product. It is also almost single-handedly responsible for introducing clues in the form of printed props—photographs, newspaper clippings, letters, postcards, etc.—to the game designer's arsenal, an innovation that has been mimicked (to varying degrees) by most of the game lines that have followed.

Recently, Chaosium prepared a new edition of *The Masks of Nyarlathotep*, giving a whole new generation of gamers a chance to tackle this intriguing epic. While earlier editions were elaborate

summon one of Lovecraft's amoral monsters to Earth. To foil the cultists, the players travel from one corner of the world to another, slowly but surely uncovering the tendrils of an enormous conspiracy and inevitably tackling the cultists' highest priests just in the nick-of-time. *Masks* makes particularly good use of this structure. Nyarlathotep, its chief baddie, is somewhat unique among Lovecraft's creations in that it manifests itself across the globe in the guise of a wide variety of false gods (the "masks" of the title). This allows the campaign to pit the players against separate cults in New York, London, Cairo, Kenya, Australia, and Shanghai that all feel different on the surface, even though they're connected under the skin. Such a wide variety of opponents keeps the campaign fresh, while the connection between the cults allows the players to remain focused on a single over-arching

**M***asks* executes its basic premise so well that it's difficult to single out individual aspects for particular praise.

boxed sets, this new version is simply a single largish and daunting book. The loose props of the first editions are now integrated into the book, forcing the Keeper (*Call of Cthulhu*'s version of the Dungeon Master) to suffer through a somewhat annoying photocopying and clipping exercise. Offsetting this relatively minor annoyance is a host of new material, including lots of additional guidance explaining how to run the campaign effectively, and a handful of new encounters and episodes that give the players even more freedom to navigate the campaign as they see fit.

Another benefit of the new format is an unbelievably low price—a mere \$22.95 buys you enough material to keep the average group gaming for at least six months.

The basic plot structure of *Masks of Nyarlathotep* is quite familiar to CoC veterans—almost every CoC campaign published since *Masks* has borrowed it. A group of mad cultists spread all over the globe is working together to perform a heinous magic ritual enabling them to

adversary. Likewise, the device the designers use to ease the players into the campaign—the mysterious disappearance of an African expedition—serves as an interesting enigma that maintains the players' interest across the dozens of lengthy sessions necessary to complete the campaign.

*Masks* executes its basic premise so well that it's difficult to single out individual aspects for particular praise. Perhaps its most admirable trait is its crisp and utilitarian organization. Many of the clues that propel the players through the various adventures are derived from 44 separate props and handouts, each of which is introduced to the Keeper with a nice explicit summary of the relevant information the players are supposed to glean from it. Similarly, every chapter contains a neat summary of the action, as well as a useful chart recapping the clues leading both into and out of the chapter. NPC descriptions are brief but useful and always accompanied by an illustration, providing the Keeper with enough information to get a genuinely

"gameable" handle on every character. All of these details combine to make *Masks* as simple to run as possible, a real asset given its length and complexity.

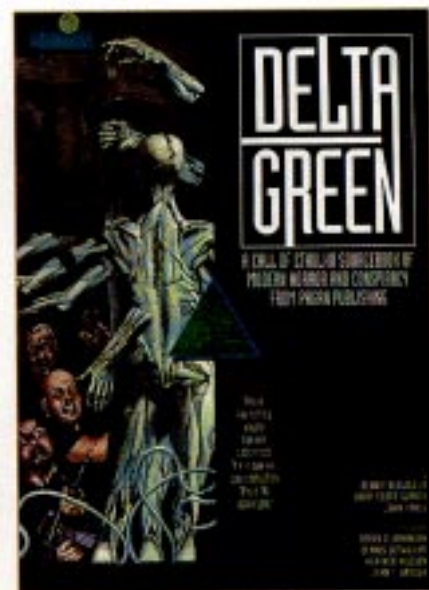
From a players' perspective, what makes *Masks* such an entertaining experience is its collection of memorable encounters and built-in opportunities for compelling roleplaying. Across the course of the campaign, the players' investigators attend a fascinating lecture at a famous university, prowl the warrens of Cairo's west bank, confront racism in Nairobi, peruse forbidden tomes, and witness the odd unspeakable rite. Several years of supplemental research between editions has helped the various chapters convincingly evoke the flavor of the historical 1920s and each of the investigators' exotic ports of call. Equally noteworthy are the interesting and unusual antagonists the investigators encounter along the way, ranging from a demented artist with a shocking secret, to a being from beyond space and time, to Nyarlathotep's hideous avatars.

In the end, *Masks* owes much of its effectiveness to its style, and owes its style to its age. *Masks* was designed in an era in which published adventures were expected to provide clear and specific instructions for running each encounter. Whereas most modern adventures and campaigns present no more than a general blueprint for the game master to follow, *Masks* rarely misses an opportunity to expound upon each and every one of the options open to the players at any given moment, providing specific advice on how the Keeper might react to all of them. In fact, the text often goes to the trouble of describing potential battles on a round-by-round basis, suggesting specific battle plans and tactics for all the non-player characters likely to get involved. Anyone familiar with early D&D® adventures will recognize this style; it's a clear throwback to the days before the "storytelling" model came to completely dominate the way RPGs are played. While some modern game designers might argue that such an approach doesn't provide the Keeper with enough flexibility to easily alter events and maintain a coherent, satisfying narrative, such a style undeniably

takes a lot of the burden off less experienced Keepers, allowing them to concentrate on unfolding the complex plot. Equally indicative of the campaign's "old school" origins are the sheer number of fully-detailed asides, red herrings and alternate paths incorporated into the overall structure. In working its way through the entire campaign, a group of investigators is likely to skip as much as a full quarter of the available material. Today's designers seem far more reluctant to allow good material to go to "waste" in this fashion, preferring instead to rely upon game masters to "steer" the players through all the included encounters comprising the pre-planned story.

In spite of its many triumphs, though, *The Complete Masks of Nyarlathotep* certainly isn't for everybody. Full enjoyment of the campaign requires an unusually ambitious commitment in both time and intensity from the Keeper and players alike. The last time I actually ran the campaign, several years ago, it took six full months to complete and required its own permanent desk to house all the notes, maps, and diagrams necessary to keep track of the plot's many twists, the disposition of almost four dozen prop handouts, and the activities of nearly one hundred NPCs! Also capable of rubbing some players the wrong way is the campaign's lethality. Players are certainly expected to lose a handful of investigators along the way; in fact, *Masks* counts upon the death or insanity of the occasional PC to help build a sense of gloom and menace. Although in this particular case the ends probably justify the means, more than one of *Masks'* encounters commits the otherwise unforgivable sin of subjecting player characters to a potentially instant and capricious end.

Evaluation: Buy this book-even if you don't think you can keep a group of players together long enough to finish the campaign, even if you're not particularly interested in *Call of Cthulhu*. Merely as an example of good, crisp campaign design, it's more than worth its comparatively meager price tag. Those of you who actually play *Masks* are likely to have some of your most memorable game sessions in store for you.



*Call of Cthulhu*  
Sourcebook/Campaign  
298-page black-and-white booklet  
Pagan Publishing \$27.95  
Design: Dennis Detwiler,  
Adam Scott Glancy, and John Tynes  
Additional Material: John H. Crowe II  
and Robert Maclaughlin  
Illustrations: Toren Atkinson,  
Dennis Detwiler, Heather Hudson,  
and John T. Snyder  
Cover: Blair Reynolds

*Call of Cthulhu* has been around so long now that it's more than a game line, it's a tiny little industry unto itself. Over the years, Chaosium has been joined by a small handful of competing publishers releasing new CoC material and without a doubt, the very finest of these upstarts is Seattle's Pagan Publishing. Pagan first hit the shelves in 1990 with *The Unspeakable Oath*, a CoC fanzine that's steadily grown in sophistication over the years to become one of the most indispensable gaming periodicals (well, "almost" periodical) on the stands. Since the debut of *TUO*, Pagan has released several full-fledged CoC sourcebooks and campaign packs, most of which tackle topics too esoteric or outrageous to fit into Chaosium's plans. Pagan's products are characterized by a noticeable attention to even the smallest of details. While larger publishers are forced to adopt more aggressive publication schedules, Pagan's status as a micropublisher gives them the freedom to be choosy about



what they release and allows them to keep sweating over every page until it meets their high standards.

*Delta Green* is Pagan's first masterpiece and an excellent example of the Pagan philosophy. DG was in development for almost four years, the lifetime of an entire product line at most publishers, and every one of those twelve hundred days of labor is noticeable in the final product. As a result, it's one of the richest, most detailed, and most complete sourcebooks ever published and one of the rarest of RPG treasures—a gigantic book that seems even bigger. In its own way, *Delta Green* is every bit as good as *The Masks of Nyarlathotep*, a remarkable feat considering the latter's near legendary reputation.

Typical of Pagan's approach, *Delta Green* establishes its own new and unusual take on both Lovecraft's source material and the *Call of Cthulhu* RPG. *Delta Green* moves the battle against Lovecraft's bizarre monstrosities into the modern day, a feat attempted with far less ambition in Chaosium's *Cthulhu Now!* published in 1987. *Delta Green's* unique twist is that it successfully melds Lovecraft's eerie mythos with modern UFO and conspiracy folklore to produce a compelling hybrid setting all its own. Players take on the roles of government agents participating in a clandestine conspiracy to rid the world of supernatural and extra-terrestrial horrors. The result invites immediate comparison to the increasingly-popular *X-Files* television program, though *Delta Green* is capable of delivering on its premise in a way you'll never see from the *X-Files*; Lovecraft's legendary menaces provide a satisfying surprise to uncover beneath the final onion layer of the grand conspiracy.

The meat of the *Delta Green* sourcebook is devoted to detailed descriptions of the handful of organizations that dominate the setting. "Delta Green" is the secret government conspiracy dedicated to wiping out paranormal phenomena that serves as the player characters' umbrella organization. "Majestic-12" (or MJ-12, based upon "real world" UFO mythology) is a rival government conspiracy that seems to have struck some sort of sinister bargain with shadowy gray visitors from

another world. The "Karotechia" is a cabal of occult-savvy Nazis who escaped to South America at the end of World War Two and aim to square off against MJ-12 and its rivals for global domination. "Saucerwatch" is a loose-knit group of UFO buffs and conspiracy theorists who are getting just a little too close to the truth for their own good. And "The Fate" is a tight network of urban occultists with their own shocking secrets. Each of these organizations is fully fleshed-out and endowed with a

## **Delta Green is Pagan's first masterpiece and an excellent example of the Pagan philosophy.**

handful of creative flourishes. Even seemingly banal concepts like occult-wielding Nazis and secret government UFO hangars (*à la* Roswell) come off as surprisingly fresh and inventive. Also noteworthy are the fascinating histories provided for each organization that carefully weave in and out of "real world" history in a fashion that lends an air of plausibility to the whole concoction. Like the equally excellent NPC descriptions included with each organization, the histories are full of little snippets capable of serving as campaign or adventure springboards.

One of *Delta Green's* most admirable traits is how it takes great pains to provide everything the players might need between its covers. Among the included goodies are: a detailed look at the Lovecraftian menaces featured prominently in the campaign, detailed bibliographies, glossaries of government slang, a fascinating chapter on real-world security clearances and secured documents, profiles and character creation information for dozens of real world government agencies, and an exhaustive treatment of modern day firearms in *Call of Cthulhu*. DG also contains a number of ready-made props of the *Masks of Nyarlathotep* variety which the Keeper can use to pass down to the players some of the setting's most interesting secrets.

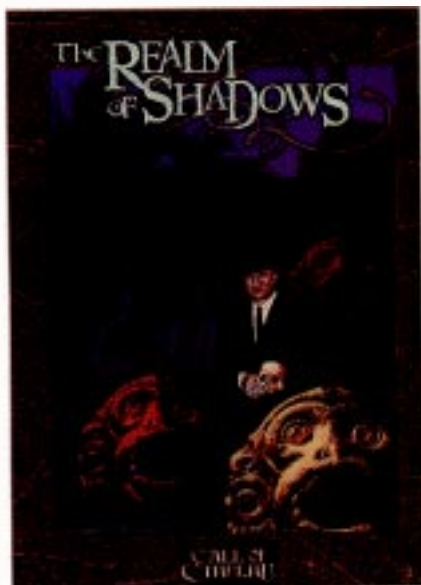
As a final gesture to push players and Keepers along their way, *Delta Green* includes two fully-developed adven-

tures and a detailed mini-campaign. "Puppet Shows and Shadowplays" finds the players investigating a string of mysterious murders in the American southwest and was specifically designed to introduce new player characters to the *Delta Green* organization and the game's backdrop. In "Convergence," the players run headlong into the government UFO conspiracy while investigating strange goings-on in a small town in Tennessee. And "The New Age," pits the players against New Age religious cultists, con-

fronts them with a conspiracy that endangers the entire planet, and gives them an opportunity to start peeling back the onion layers masking the terrible truth that lies at the heart of *Delta Green's* setting. Typical of the high watermark set by the rest of the package, none of the included scenarios is simply tossed off or provided out of a sense of obligation. All three easily stand alongside the best CoC stand-alone adventures.

Evaluation: One of the really interesting things about *Delta Green* is how it potentially expands *Call of Cthulhu's* audience. Even players who aren't very interested in Lovecraft but enjoy the popular *X-Files* series or conspiracy theory folklore will simply devour this book. Pagan thoughtfully kept all the included material incredibly accessible to such players—*Delta Green* and the CoC rulebook are all that's necessary to get any group up and running smoothly.

Equally interesting is how difficult it is to find fault with any aspect of *Delta Green*. The book contains all the material any Keeper could possibly expect, all of it first rate; the illustrations are excellent and helpful; the included adventures are top-notch; and the price is remarkably reasonable considering the tremendous value stuffed into DG'S 298 pages. Products like this come along only very rarely. For *Call of Cthulhu* fans, *Delta Green* is a must buy. For everybody else, it's still probably worth a look.



## Realm of Shadows

*Call of Cthulhu* Campaign  
204 page black-and-white  
booklet

Pagan Publishing

\$20.95

Design: John H. Crowe III

Illustrations: Blair Reynolds

Cover: Blair Reynolds



I had a uniquely Lovecraftian and unsettling experience the first time I flipped through this booklet. The first things that drew my eye were Blair Reynolds' quirky, yet strangely familiar illustrations. After a while, I finally realized that Reynolds was using movie stills and other photographs as direct references to achieve his photorealistic style; I recognized a shot of Gert Frobe from Goldfinger, a character actor from Howard Hawks' *Scarface*, and one or two other obscure personalities I'd noticed in old B-movies and serials. Then, as I flipped further, I stumbled over Reynolds' drawings of horrifying ghouls and monstrosities, all executed in the same photorealistic style, forcing me to wonder exactly how he got those particular photo references. Appropriately enough, this exact revelation lies at the heart of "Pickman's Model" one of H.P. Lovecraft's stories that inspired *Realm of Shadows*.

*Realm of Shadows* is another *Call of Cthulhu* campaign, similar in construction to *Complete Masks of Nyarlathotep*. Once again, the players travel the globe, battling a mad cult that worships a monstrosity from beyond space and time.

Play begins when a small-town doctor hires the players to find his fleeing wife and daughter. Eventually, things prove far more complicated than they seem and the players begin a merry chase across Massachusetts and down into the rain forests of French Guiana. A nice change of pace is provided by a chapter set in Lovecraft's Dreamlands, a peculiar sort of "sword and sorcery" fantasy world that exists in the dreams of Lovecraft's heroes.

Although not as well organized as *Masks of Nyarlathotep*, *Realm of Shadows* is still excellently conceived and relatively easy to run. Each chapter contains useful

**R** *realm of Shadows is a natural evolutionary next-step along the trail of sophisticated storytelling.*

summaries recapping the general flow of play and each is supplemented by useful addenda that nicely amplify pieces of the action and give the Keeper the details he needs to deliver useful descriptions and handle tricky situations. Equally useful are the "playtest notes" scattered throughout the text, describing various situations that cropped up during playtesting and discussing how the designer dealt with them. Taking another cue from *Masks*, *RoS* is also laden with handful of optional encounters and side plots that give the players some flexibility and room to tackle the campaign as they see fit. To an extent, *RoS* also implements *Masks'* "old school" philosophy of presenting extremely detailed advice on how to handle most situations, in place of the more general hints and suggestions that one tends to find in more modern products.

Typical for a Pagan product, several details set *Realm of Shadows* aside from the typical *Call of Cthulhu* campaign. First and foremost is the intriguing setting. While most CoC adventures are set in the 1920s, *RoS* is set in 1940, against the backdrop of World War II, a seemingly subtle change that has an interesting impact on play, particularly once the action progresses beyond the boundaries of the United States. *RoS* is also a bit more sophisticated in its approach to

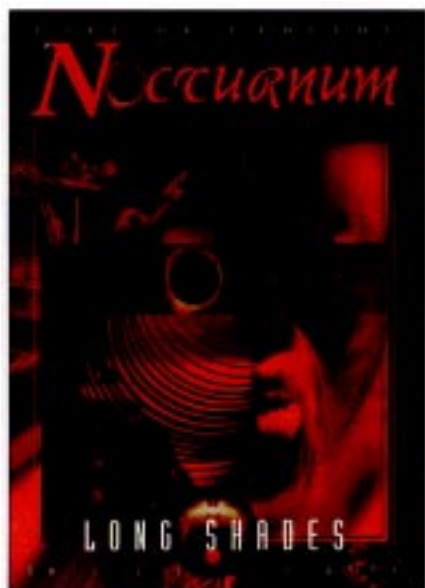
its subject matter than the average Chaosium product. *Realm's* major baddies are developed to an unprecedented depth, and its approaches to fostering a horrific atmosphere are a bit more direct and effective than usual. As a result, *RoS* is probably not an appropriate campaign for the more squeamish members of the audience, though more sophisticated roleplayers will probably appreciate the challenge. In many ways, *Realm of Shadows* is a natural evolutionary next-step along trail of sophisticated storytelling initiated by *The Masks of Nyarlathotep*.

Of course, *RoS* is not without a few flaws. The links between its first and sec-

ond adventures are a bit more tenuous than I like, for example, and some of the organization makes it easy to reference key passages during play, but hard for the Keeper to effectively absorb all the material during an initial read-through. Although exemplary in its execution and genuinely innovative in places, perhaps *Realm's* biggest disappointment is its over-reliance on the *Masks of Nyarlathotep* formula: one more globe-spanning insane cult hoping to open a gateway to another world to free their beloved monstrosity. Although the difficulties inherent in gaming some of Lovecraft's sensibilities are obvious, it's probably time for CoC to broaden its horizons a bit and tackle a wider variety of situations and adversaries, just like Lovecraft's fiction. Pagan is probably the perfect publisher for such "experimental" campaigns.

**Evaluation:** If you're looking for a truly interesting and well-developed campaign with its own set of sensibilities, *Realm of Shadows* is for you. Despite the fact that it is somewhat over-reliant on the tried-and-true CoC formula, *RoS* is still probably the best Cthulhu campaign published in the last few years. I should probably repeat my warning that the squeamish may want to steer clear, but most die-hard *Call of Cthulhu* fans will correctly interpret such a warning as high praise.





## Nocturnum: Long Shades



*Call of Cthulhu* Campaign  
Sourcebook

120 page black-and-white booklet  
Fantasy Flight Games \$19.95

Design Darrell Hardy, Christian T.  
Petersen, and Andrew Warren

Additional Input: Peter Mork

Illustrations: Bill Heagy  
and Brian Ewing

Cover: C. Brent Ferguson

Fantasy Flight Games is the latest *Call of Cthulhu* licensee. Judging from its first product, *Nocturnum: Long Shades*, Fantasy Flight is aiming to follow in Pagan Publishing's footsteps to carve out their own peculiar visions of both CoC and Lovecraft's fiction. *Long Shades* is the first book in a promised *Nocturnum* trilogy. Although the three adventures that comprise *Long Shades* are seemingly unrelated on the surface and designed to be intermixed into an ongoing campaign, they're apparently intended as early seeds in what will eventually develop into a full-fledged *Nocturnum* campaign.

What makes *Nocturnum* unusual among published CoC materials is its rejection of Lovecraft's traditional adversaries in favor of a new menace, the otherworldly Shk'ryth. *Long Shades* contains a fairly complete description of the Shk'ryth and a detailed overview of how they are related to Lovecraft's various entities. Those of you who aren't terribly familiar with Lovecraft and CoC should probably note that this concept isn't nearly as blasphemous as it might

sound. Most of what constitutes the so-called "Cthulhu Mythos" that forms the basis of CoC, is actually a hodgepodge of the works of a number of different writers, many of whom were encouraged by Lovecraft himself to take great liberties with his writings and to favor their own concepts. In fact, if Lovecraft were alive today, he'd probably prefer Fantasy Flight's approach to his work over those scenarios that merely reanimate his pre-existing creations. Still, introducing an entirely new menace has both positive and negative implications for roleplaying. On the plus side is the promise of variety and a new series of challenges (though so far, the Shk'ryth don't seem all that unlike some of Lovecraft's traditional horrors). On the minus side, the lack of familiarity places an extra burden on *Nocturnum*'s designers to make sure that Keepers get all the information they need to properly animate the Shk'ryth. Fortunately, this last task is relatively well-handled.

Like *Delta Green*, the *Nocturnum* trilogy attempts to bring CoC into a present day setting. *Long Shades'* three adventures cover a fairly broad variety of situations and settings. The first, "Snowflake Valley," finds the players snowbound in a mountain village, where they witness a string of grisly murders and ultimately encounter a terrifying new evil. "The Madness of the Twilight King" confronts the players with the phenomenon of a strange new hallucinogenic drug that's sweeping across an otherwise quiet college campus. The final adventure, "Stillness," sends the investigators out in search of a young Japanese girl who's been kidnapped and provides the first glimpses into the direction in which the *Nocturnum* campaign is heading.

All told, *Long Shades* is a fairly impressive first product, though not as inspired as the efforts from Pagan Publishing or the best that Chaosium has to offer. While there are a few flourishes in all three adventures that promise great things in Fantasy Flight's future, there are a few instances of under-developed character motivations and an occasional over-reliance on stereotypical situations. In the first adventure, for instance, a murder spree conducted by one of the menaces seems a bit too ham-handed and illogical given the supposedly

frightening powers of its master. Similarly, in the same adventure, it's suggested that a stunningly powerful extra-dimensional entity who has been imprisoned on the earth for thousands of years might make reprisals against the meddlesome player characters by sending some "thugs" to beat them up.

Evaluation: While far from perfect, *Nocturnum: Long Shades* might provide an interesting change of pace for *Call of Cthulhu* veterans. In any case, the book's high production values and occasional creative flourishes bode well for Fantasy Flight. If the future volumes in the trilogy improve as much as I expect they might, CoC buffs can look forward to some terrific adventures.

## Short and Sweet

*Guidebook: Spooks and Oracles*, by Mark Cenczyk and Dawn Kahan (White Wolf Publishing, \$18). White Wolf is on a roll. The last seven or eight consecutive releases have been outstanding, and *Spooks & Oracles* is no exception. Inside, you'll find the usual assortment of new powers, merits, and flaws for *Spook and Oracle* characters, as well as some interesting insights into a couple of the nooks and crannies that permeate the World of Darkness. A few of the Oracle character templates are a tad too self-referential and hokey, but this book is still a must for *Wraith* fans.

RAVENLOFT®: *The Shadow Rift*, by William W. Connors, Cindi Rice, and John D. Rateliff (TSR, \$22.95). TSR finally gives us a glimpse into the notorious Shadow Rift that takes up all that space on the RAVENLOFT campaign map, and succeeds in conjuring up a truly eerie and refreshing adventuring environment. Home to an interesting assortment of dark elves, the Shadow Rift is a sort of interesting cross between Narnia, Wonderland, and Mordor. Although the concept of opening a mystical gate to free an all-powerful entity has been trite for years, the atmosphere and occasional strangeness of this product will be enough to win over most DMs.



Ray Winninger has been a professional writer and game designer since 1984.



## INDUSTRY NEWS

### TROLL SUSPENDS PUBLICATION

*Troll*\* Magazine has suspended publication. Publisher Richard Stalder reports that authors for issue #2 will be paid but that issue #3, already printed, will be destroyed rather than distributed. "For me this was a chance of a life time," he writes. "I got to work with some of the finest people in the gaming industry. My only regret is that I couldn't make it work out in the end." Questions about the magazine should be directed to Richard at Troll@gvi.net.

### PYRAMID GOES ELECTRONIC

Steve Jackson Games announced in April that *Pyramid*\* magazine was ceasing publication as a paper magazine, moving instead to the Web. Editor Scott Haring said, "We can deliver more content for a lower price, use the immediacy of the Internet for more timely industry news coverage, and use the multimedia capabilities of the web to do things you could never do on paper." Subscriptions cost \$15 per year, about half the cost of the paper subscriptions. For more information, or to subscribe to the online *Pyramid*, check out the site at [www.sjgames.com/pyramid/](http://www.sjgames.com/pyramid/).

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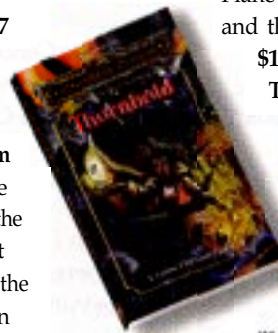
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# Profiles



DAVE ARNESON

The co-designer of the original  
DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game

has stayed busy as a game designer,  
reviewer, video historian, and  
all-around nice guy.

By Allen Varney

**D**ave Arneson caught bottled lightning over 20 years ago, when he and Gary Gyga designed the original DUNGEONS & DRAGONS® game. How would Arneson's life be different today if D&D® hadn't happened? "Lordy, I would have had to get a real nine-to-five job as a teacher or a librarian," says the lifelong game designer, now 50. He'd never have "met thousands of fascinating people, rubbed elbows with the strange and infamous, or gotten to travel around the world guesting at conventions. This has been much more fun!"

D&D sprang from that sense of fun. In the late 1960s, Arneson played miniatures games in the Castle and Crusade gaming club in Lake Geneva, WI. One medieval miniatures campaign used a rules set called *Chainmail*, designed by local gamers Gary Gyga and Jeff Perren. Arneson played in this and other games but disliked their emphasis on simulation. "Military miniature folks tend to insist on historically accurate sets of rules," he says. "This is an impossibility that has never bothered them."

Arneson has told the next part often: "I had spent the previous two days watching about five monster movies on channel 5's 'Creature Feature' weekend, reading several Conan books (I cannot recall which ones, but I always thought they were all pretty much the same), and stuffing myself with popcorn, doodling on a piece of graph paper. At the time, I was quite tired of my Nappy (Napoleonic) campaign with all its rigid rules and was rebelling against it."

Those *Chainmail* games soon saw invasions by fantasy creatures from Tolkien and mythology. "Wizard" and "hero" military units appeared and soon migrated off the battlefield into individual quests. Arneson recalls, "Going from commanding armies that had objectives, it seemed logical you could be an individual with objectives and play a role without strict guidelines."

Logical, and a lot of fun. Arneson soon originated the very first fantasy campaign: "I never considered not making Blackmoor a campaign. I started out with a bunch of dyed-in-the-wool historical miniatures players and board

gamers: That's a tough audience, but most thought the whole idea was great!"

Arneson calls BLACKMOOR® "roleplaying in a non-traditional medieval setting. I have such things as steam power, gunpowder, and submarines in limited numbers. There was even a tank running around for a while. The emphasis is on the story and the roleplaying."

"Blackmoor has always been my only setting, although the lads have visited other times and places. I still get together today with many of the original players, thus making Blackmoor the longest continuously-running fantasy roleplaying campaign in the world—25 years and counting."

BLACKMOOR (1974) offered little scenic detail. Gamers saw the setting only in TSR's four DA-series modules (1986-87), three of them by Arneson himself.

After D&D, Arneson has kept busy. His early-'80s publishing company, Adventure Games, produced the first editions of two notable miniatures games, *Johnny Reb* and *Harpoon*, as well as his own *Adventure in Fantasy RPG* (1982). "I have done computer game review columns, written history articles, raised rabbits (not as easy as it sounds!), work on computer games (*Storm Clouds Over Dixie*), and play games when I can."

Now he's working on a video documentary, *Dragons in the Basement*, about the origin and first decade of RPGs. "Basically it is a series of interviews with original players ('How did D&D affect your life?') and original RPG designers like Marc Miller (*Traveller*) and M.A.R. Barker (*Empire of the Petal Throne*). I hope it will be out by fall."

After that, he has other ambitions. "I would like to travel around, talk to D&D players, and see what they have done. I don't think anyone follows the rules exactly. Are there trends? Does the play differ from area to area?" The project might carry him far afield: "There were at one time over a dozen translations of the basic rules. Do the D&D rules still work after translation? And what do these foreign players think?"

So if you're playing D&D at a convention or club meeting, and a genial, bushy-bearded fellow starts asking how your games work, be nice. That's Dave Arneson, a nice guy who caught lightning in a bottle.





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